# Putting Internationalisation Strategies into Practice: The Role of University Non-leaders' Sensemaking

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# PUTTING INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGIES INTO PRACTICE: THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY NON-LEADERS' SENSEMAKING

BA-LINH TRAN

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| | |
|---|---|
| **ABET** | Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology |
| **ASEAN** | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| **AUN-QA** | ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance |
| **CEFR** | Common European Framework of Reference for Languages |
| **EMI** | English as the medium of instruction |
| **HEI** | higher education institution |
| **IELTS** | International English Language Testing System |
| **MOA** | memorandum of agreement |
| **MOU** | memorandum of understanding |
| **PEST** | Political, Economic, Socio-cultural, Technological (a strategic analysis tool) |
| **PVC** | Pro-Vice Chancellor (of a university) |
| **SAP** | Strategy-as-Practice |
| **SWOT** | Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (a strategic analysis tool) |
| **TOEFL** | Test of English as a Foreign Language |
| **VC** | Vice-Chancellor (of a university) |
| **VCP** | Vietnam Communist Party |
| **VNUHCM** | Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh city |

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# ABSTRACT

Internationalisation is the buzzword in higher education, and indeed it would be a challenge to find a university that has no *internationalisation strategies*. However, very few studies have explored higher education internationalisation from a strategic management perspective. Thus, little is known about how universities formulate and implement internationalisation strategies and perhaps more importantly how such strategies are being executed or realised into concrete outcomes. The present study aims to address this gap by exploring how internationalisation strategies are made sense of and realised by three university stakeholders who are not conventionally strategy-makers but are instrumental in creating outcomes for internationalisation strategies: deans, lecturers and students.

The theoretical grounding of this study is based on the Strategy-as-Practice approach in strategic management and sensemaking theory. Empirical evidence is gathered from two case studies in Vietnam using a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document analysis, quasi-ethnographic campus visits and social media analysis.

This study has found that the outcomes of internationalisation strategies and even the strategies themselves are shaped by how deans, lecturers and students make sense of them. This sensemaking is special in that most of the time (a) it happens without intent, due to the three stakeholders' lack of interest in university-level strategic matters, and (b) it is indirect and implicit, because the stakeholders seldom have access to formal strategic information but rather become aware of internationalisation strategies by noticing internationalisation matters in the mundane, routine tasks of their respective roles. Briefly put, sensemaking of internationalisation strategies occur through sensemaking of role-related tasks. Which and how the tasks, and thus internationalisation strategies, are made sense of then depend on the distinct role features and individual schemas of deans, lecturers and students, and can be constrained by institutional forces at the meso (organisational) and macro (extra-organisational, field, societal) levels. In the end, the three stakeholders' sensemaking lead them towards actions that create a spectrum of outcomes for internationalisation strategies, ranging from better-than-intended to complete failure. More importantly, some of the actions result in emergent ways of doing that replace formal strategies as the university's *de facto* internationalisation strategies. In rare cases, non-leaders' sensemaking may even stimulate strategy innovation or adjustment.

The findings also respectively highlight the role of frontline engagement, micro-politics and social media in the sensemaking process of deans, lecturers and students. In addition, it has been found that deans, lecturers and students' meaning-making can be leveraged to great effects by top management via empowerment.

The insights generated in this study have provided contributions to three literatures, namely higher education internationalisation, Strategy-as-Practice and sensemaking. My study also carries practical implications for the strategic management of higher education internationalisation.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine how the internationalisation strategies of a university are realised (or executed) via the sensemaking of deans, lecturers and students, all of whom are not conventionally institutional strategy-makers and yet are instrumental to the success or failure of strategies. The study is positioned at the intersection of higher education internationalisation and strategic management, seeking to apply a strategic management perspective to studying higher education internationalisation. The theoretical scaffolding, therefore, is rooted in the strategic management and organisation studies literatures; more specifically, this study borrows heavily from the Strategy-as-Practice movement (see Golsorkhi et al., 2015a for an overview), which calls for exploration of strategy as people's actions rather than organisations' properties, and from Karl Weick's sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). The key feature of such theoretical scaffolding is its focus on the micro (individual and group) in order to generate insights for both the micro and meso (organisation) – the micro and meso in this case being people's sensemaking and university strategies, respectively. Methodologically, the present study is a qualitative, comparative case study of two Vietnamese universities that have explicit internationalisation strategies and are actively internationalising, with the data collected from individual interviews, focus groups, documents, campus visits and social media. The Vietnamese context is chosen for its long history of higher education internationalisation (Tran, Marginson, & Nguyen, 2014), relative novelty (Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2013; University of Oxford, 2015) and practicality – I myself am Vietnamese and was educated in Vietnam up to university level, and I have a personal network of lecturers, academic managers, highschool teachers and my own students, all of whom could help with case selection if not access. While based in Vietnam, the study is expected to generate theoretical contributions and practical implications that are transferrable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to other contexts.

This introductory chapter provides the background for the study by explaining the motivation behind it (1.1), which is both personal to me and grounded in the literature on higher education internationalisation. Thereafter, I will present the research question and demonstrate how it has been refined thanks to the incorporation of the strategic management and organisation studies literatures, specifically sensemaking theory (1.2). The next section briefly addresses the terminology and theoretical assumptions of the term 'university non-leaders', which I use as a collective for deans, lecturers and students (1.3). The last section of this chapter outlines the structure of thesis (1.4).

## 1.1. Motivation for the study: Personal interest and gap in the literature

The motivation for this study can be traced back to when I did my Master's degree in English language teaching at the University of Bath in the UK. One of the first things I noticed about Bath upon arrival, or during induction week to be more precise was how much the university

promoted itself as being international. For example, there was the One World Week[1], which was a series of events for students to showcase the culture of their home countries and for staff to present research done internationally. Another example was the induction session of my programme, where the programme director said Bath accommodated over 100 nationalities[2] in its staff and student body. Nonetheless, what struck me the most was the background of my lecturers, all of whom had not only worked but lived in at least two countries, and one of them had taught for many years in my home country of Vietnam.

I was thus curious as to how Bath developed its international aspects – back then I was not aware of the term 'internationalisation'. More specifically, I was less interested in the academic dimension of internationalisation, such as appropriate pedagogies for a multi-cultural classroom, than its managerial one. To start with, it was a wonder to me how one university that was not world-renown, at least reputationally (unlike, say, Oxford, Stanford, National University of Singapore or Tokyo) managed to recruit and handle visas for over 100 nationalities. While it was easy to attribute this highly diverse student and staff body to globalisation and the pull of the British economy, I also believed the university itself had to have internationalisation plans and was effective in executing them. For example, I first came into contact with Bath through its Asia Pacific representative, who visited Vietnam two times per year; in order for the university to maintain its nationality diversity track record, the representative must have fulfilled her responsibilites really well, and this begged the question of how. Nonetheless, it never occurred to me to pursue the management of internationalisation as a research topic, as it was irrelevant to my Master's programme plus I had no intent on a career in academia, so the idea remained a little, fun thought exercise.

I started to consider undertaking research into higher education internationalisation several months after the completion of my Master's. By then I had returned to Vietnam and, alongside teaching English, started a researcher position at an international research agency specialising in lifelong learning. This provided me with opportunities to meet scholars from around the world and engage in various projects, which often commenced and ended with an international conference. In this way, the job re-ignited my interest in internationalisation, as I found myself wondering how these scholars were so mobile. In addition, I was also considering an academic career. Eventually, I felt there was merit in revisiting and pursuing the management of internationalisation as a research topic and therefore decided to develop it into a doctoral research project.

The specific issues I wished to study were (a) the formulation of university internationalisation plans and (b) the reception and realisation (or execution) of these plans by people at lower levels of the decision-making hierarchy whom I termed 'non-leaders', like

[1] https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/one-world-week-starts-on-22-october/
[2] https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/facts-and-figures/

Bath's representative in Asia Pacific, the lecturers of my Master's programme (including the programme director) and the scholars I met in my job. It was quickly decided, however, that such a study would be too ambitious, so I narrowed my research interests to the reception and realisation of internationalisation plans by three specific non-leader groups: deans, lecturers and students (see 1.3 for my theoretical assumptions). Thus, this study was conceived.

Given my research interests, this study would be positioned at the intersection of research into higher education internationalisation and strategic management (I found that a university's plans were called strategies). Therefore, the first necessary step was to consult both literatures in order to gain a baseline understanding of internationalisation and strategic management. I paid particular attention to research on higher education internationalisation from a strategic management perspective to see if my idea had been explored and if so what were other potential gaps that I could examine for this study. My literature review was accomplished with two databases: Web of Science and Scopus, and the search engine Google Scholar; the keywords used included, to name a few, *university internationalisation*, *university internationalisation strategy*, *university internationalisation strategy implementation*, *internationalisation strategy dean*, *strategic management of internationalisation lecturer*. I found that, while there had been studies into internationalisation as university strategies (see 2.1.3 for a detailed review), none of them had addressed the reception and realisation of internationalisation strategies by deans, lecturers and students. In fact, most of these studies only utilise the theoretical resources of strategic management in a perfunctory manner (also see 2.1.3). Therefore, not only would my study be original, but there was a lot of scope to cross-fertilise higher education internationalisation and strategic management.

In the end, the literature review affirmed my motivation to pursue the study and led to the framing of my research question:

> *How are university internationalisation strategies received and realised by non-leaders?*

## 1.2. Research question: A short evolution

While having an original and interdisciplinary question was undoubtedly motivating, it also presented a challenge given there was little guidance on which theoretical lens and methodology could be used. As I further examined the strategic management literature, I found one particular theoretical-methodological approach to strategy research that could provide a sound solution: Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) (see 2.2.2 for a detailed review). SAP is an approach that focuses on the 'micro-level social activities, processes and practices' (Golsorkhi et al., 2015b, p.1) involved in strategy making and implementation. This marks a movement away from conventional strategy research which places emphasis on strategies themselves and their impact on organisational performance (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

SAP draws upon a lot of theories from sociology and organisation studies and is oriented toward qualitative methodology.

Among the theories used by SAP scholars, Karl Weick's sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) appeared a strong fit with my research question (see 2.2.3 for a detailed review). Sensemaking is an organisation theory of how people make meaning of organisational ambiguities, and how organisations emerge from the exploratory and experimental actions that they take during meaning-making. In this way, the theory addresses both the notions of 'reception' (meaning making) and 'realisation' (action) in my research question. For this reason, when adopting sensemaking as the theoretical lens, I was inspired to refine my research question by combining *reception* and *realisation* into the concept of sensemaking:

*How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?*

This became my final research question, which I believe is definitely better than the initial one because it is more theoretically precise and therefore able to inform the readers of the theoretical grounding of my study. Moreover, it was hoped that answering the question would generate insights not only for higher education internationalisation, specifically the sensemaking (reception and realisation) of internationalisation strategies by deans, lecturers and students, but potentially also for SAP and sensemaking, since I found in the literature that little SAP or sensemaking research has dealt the context of university internationalisation.

## 1.3. 'University non-leaders'

Before proceeding to the body of the thesis, I wish to address the terminology and theoretical assumptions of this study, which revolve around the term 'university non-leaders'. As stated above, I created the term to indicate a collective of people at the lower levels of a university's decision-making hierarchy. More precisely, I consider non-leaders to be anyone outside of a university's governance (e.g. board or council members, academic senates) and executive/top management (e.g. the Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellors). Therefore, the verb 'lead' here does not take on an intuitive, common sense definition of 'to lead other people'; rather, it means 'to govern or manage at a corporate level'.

In this study, I assume that strategy-making is a distinct responsibility and right of university leaders. This does not mean, however, that non-leaders cannot contribute to strategy-making or devise their own strategic initiatives, but this is only possible if leaders enable them to. This assumption makes an investigation into the strategic role of non-leaders interesting because they are the ones realising strategies despite little if any control over them. That said, my study focuses on only three groups of non-leaders: deans, lecturers and students.

Another terminological note I wish to make concerns the term 'university'. What constitutes a university varies across countries (see Forest & Altbach, 2007, pp. 159-206, 409-572) and in some cases the term 'university' is synonymous with higher education. In this study, I use university and higher education interchangeably to refer to postsecondary institutions that deliver academic undergraduate and postgraduate education and are allowed to grant degrees by the state. My understanding is based on the International Standard Classification of Education by UNESCO[3].

## 1.4. Structure of the thesis

The thesis contains eight chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on higher education internationalisation in order to define the concept of internationalisation in higher education and demonstrate the strategic significance of internationalisation to universities. I will concentrate on any internationalisation research that has taken a strategic management perspective, based on which I will argue that there is a need for internationalisation research to engage more substantially with the strategic management literature. The second half of Chapter 2 establishes my theoretical framework to resolve the research question by examining and incorporating the SAP approach and sensemaking theory.

Chapter 3 details the methodology used in this study. It begins with a disclosure of my paradigmatic stance of pragmatism, by which methodological choices have been made. My comparative case design is then introduced, along with the criteria for case selection and the expected empirical output from each case. The next section of Chapter 3 looks at the context of this study: Vietnam and the city of Saigon. With the design and context established, I describe how two Vietnamese universities (coded *Blue* and *Red*) were chosen as cases and how participants were recruited. This is followed by a historical report of the data collection and analysis procedures. At the end of Chapter 3, I talk about the maintenance of ethics and quality throughout the study.

Chapter 4 and 5 respectively present the case studies of *Blue* and *Red*. Each chapter starts with the institutional profile of one university, including its history, organisational structure, corporate strategy and internationalisation strategies. This is followed by a report of how its internationalisation strategies were made sense of by deans, lecturers and students. Due to the space constraint of this thesis, only a few strategies are included; these strategies are chosen for yielding interview accounts that portray the university from multiple perspectives and that generate distinct themes. Chapter 4 and 5 will empirically show that the strategic

[3] http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

management of university internationalisation depends considerably on non-leaders' sensemaking.

Chapter 6 further exhausts the data by comparing the two cases. It will focus on cross-case patterns in the sensemaking of internationalisation strategies by each non-leader group across *Blue* and *Red*, as well as the impact of institutional contexts on sensemaking. While Chapter 4 and 5 evidence the role of non-leaders' sensemaking in internationalisation strategies, Chapter 6 serves to delineate the manner in which sensemaking of the strategies might be done by deans, lecturers and students. This will become the direct basis for discussion.

Chapter 7 discusses the sensemaking of university internationalisation strategies by non-leaders, bringing together the findings of Chapter 4, 5 and especially 6. The discussion will examine key sensemaking issues that have emerged from the case studies, some of which apply to all non-leader groups while some are unique to one. From these intergroup and intragroup issues, I will then draw (a) the answer to my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* and in turn (b) knowledge contributions to the strategic management of university internationalisation, as well as to SAP and sensemaking theory. Ultimately, this study has found that there is more to the strategic management of university internationalisation than having and implementing the *right* strategy, in that the outcomes of internationalisation strategies and even the strategies themselves are shaped by the sensemaking of deans, lecturers and students. Moreover, the way these non-leader groups make sense of internationalisation strategies is special as it is often unintentional, implicit and embedded in the mundane, routine tasks of their roles.

Chapter 8 summarises the thesis and outlines its practical implications and limitations. Recommendations for future research are also provided.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: First, it reviews extant literature on internationalisation in higher education in order to define the subject-matter and examine any previous studies that have taken a strategic management perspective to investigate internationalisation. Second, from this review it demonstrates the scarcity and theoretical shortcomings of strategy-based research into higher education internationalisation, thus arguing for the necessity of deeper engagement with the strategic management literature by scholars in higher education internationalisation. In turn, the originality of the present study is proven. Third and finally, the chapter reviews the strategic management literature to establish a theoretical framework for this study.

All literature in this study has been found with two databases: Web of Science and Scopus, supplemented by the search engine Google Scholar. The 10 core keywords are *higher education internationalisation*, *university internationalisation*, *higher education internationalisation strategy*, *university internationalisation strategy*, *strategic management of higher education internationalisation*, *strategic management of university internationalisation*, *strategic management*, *strategy*, *middle managers*, *frontliners*. All other keywords are derived from the 10 core keywords (e.g. *university internationalisation deans*) or result from the literature found using these 10 keywords (e.g. *strategy as practice*). Both British and American spelling have been used.

The chapter is split into two main sections. Section 2.1 will provide an indepth look into what internationalisation is and why it is a strategic matter for universities. The section will also review existing studies into internationalisation as university strategies. Section 2.1 fulfils the first two goals of this chapter. In Section 2.2, I will examine the concept of strategy as defined by numerous authors from the 1940s to early 2000s. The Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) approach in strategy research is then presented, followed by sensemaking theory. Section 2.2 constitutes the theoretical framework of this study, which is the third and final goal of this chapter.

I wish to note that, as mentioned in the Introduction chapter, my research question underwent a short evolution from its initial, preliminary phrasing *How are university internationalisation strategies received and realised by non-leaders?* into *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* This refinement was inspired by and only came after my review of sensemaking theory, which as will be shown perfectly captures both notions of 'reception' and 'realisation'. In order to reflect the evolution of the research question and its link with sensemaking theory, in this chapter I will refer to the preliminary phrasing whenever the research question is mentioned up until the introduction of sensemaking theory in 2.2.3, at which point I will demonstrate how the theory has helped refine the question into its final phrasing.

## 2.1. Higher education internationalisation

This section reviews the literature on higher education internationalisation in order to define the subject-matter and examine any research into higher education internationalisation from a strategic management perspective, thereby generating insights for my (as of now preliminary) research question *How are university internationalisation strategies received and realised by non-leaders?* In so doing, I will also demonstrate the importance of internationalisation as a strategic area for universities and therefore the necessity of studying internationalisation as strategies. More importantly, the review identifies the strategic management of internationalisation as a gap in extant research, thereby substantiating the relevance of my study and more generally the cross-fertilisation of the higher education internationalisation and strategic management literatures, where my study is positioned.

This section begins by synthesising the various definitions of internationalisation in higher education (2.1.1) into a working understanding for this study. The rationales for internationalisation are then outlined (2.1.2), demonstrating why it has become a 'ubiquitous buzzword' (Brandenburg, 2016, Times Higher Education blog) for universities and also a matter of strategic importance. Finally, any internationalisation research that has been conducted from a strategic management perspective is examined (2.1.3) to see if they offer theoretical insights for my study.

### 2.1.1. Conceptualising internationalisation: A historical view

Originally used in economics, internationalisation only gained popularity in education, particularly higher education, in the 1990s with Knight's (1994) seminal publication *Internationalization: Elements and Checkpoints*. Historically, however, the notion of having an international dimension in higher education can be traced to the term 'international education', which was itself a popular research topic post-World War II. International education is an umbrella term that, according to Harari (1972), involves the international content of the curriculum, international movement of scholars and students, and international technical assistance and educational programmes. Harari's ideas are reiterated by Arum and van de Water (1992), who build upon various definitions of international education and develop their own: 'the multiple activities, programs and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation' (p. 202). The common feature of these early definitions is that international education exists as a separate set of activities that are recognisable for their international dimension (e.g. student and staff exchange, international development studies). This clear-cut view, however, also creates a fragmented approach where people who participate in one activity of international education are often disconnected from those in another and moreover from the rest of the institution (de Wit, 2002; Green & Olson, 2003). Thus, there arose a need to reconceptualise international education.

'Internationalisation' emerged as an alternative term in the early 90s and was first defined by Knight (1993, cited in Knight, 1994, p. 7) as

> *the process of integrating the international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education*

The definition marks a shift from an activity-focused to a process-focused perspective. Unlike international education, internationalisation proposes that the international dimension should not be contained within discreet activities but continually integrated into all aspects of the higher education institution (HEI). This reflects the increasing importance of being international in higher education (de Wit, 2013a) and shows that it is a much more complex matter than individual activities or programmes, which themselves have been growing in quantity and diversity (Green & Olson, 2003; de Haan, 2014). Internationalisation therefore became the term of choice from the 1990s, and Knight's definition has greatly influenced subsequent works in the field.

Knight's definition, however, is not the only attempt to conceptualise internationalisation. On the contrary, numerous authors have taken the process perspective as starting point and arrived at their own understanding. Table 1 below presents the existing definitions of internationalisation, which span the 1990s and early 2000s with Knight herself updating her definition in 2004.

*Table 1*. Definitions of internationalisation

| Scholar | Year | Definition | Level of analysis |
|---|---|---|---|
| Knight | 1993 | the process of integrating the international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education (cited in Knight, 1994, p. 7) | organisational |
| Rudzki | 1995 | a defining feature of all universities, encompassing organisational change, curriculum innovation, staff development and student mobility, for the purposes of achieving excellence in teaching and research (p. 421) | organisational |
| van der Wende | 1997 | any systematic effort aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalisation of society, economy and labour markets (p. 18) | national/ sectoral |
| Ellingboe | 1998 | the process of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system (p. 199) | national/ sectoral |
| Schoorman | 1999 | ongoing, counter hegemonic educational process that occurs in an international context of knowledge and practice where societies are viewed as subsystems of a larger, inclusive world. The process of internationalization at an educational institution entails a comprehensive, multifaceted program of action that is integrated into all aspects of education. (p. 21) | organisational |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Soderqvist | 2002 | a change process from a national higher education institution to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies (p. 29) | organisational |
| Knight | 2004 | the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (p. 11) | national/ sectoral |
| Teichler | 2004 | the totality of substantial changes in the context and inner life of higher education relative to an increasing frequency of border-crossing activities amidst a persistence of national systems (p. 22) | national/ sectoral |

All the authors refer to internationalisation as a process either explicitly, using the word 'process' itself, or implicitly, associating internationalisation with change (Rudzki, 1995; van der Wende, 1997; Teichler, 2004). Their definitions, nonetheless, clearly differ in some respects. First, while some frame internationalisation within the organisational settings of a HEI, others broaden this process to a whole higher education sector, thus involving agencies that draft or influence national internationalisation policies. The second difference is whether a rationale is mentioned. While Rudzki (1995) and Soderqvist (2002) highlight enhancing academic quality as the main purpose of internationalisation, most definitions do not include any rationales for internationalisation and in fact Knight (2004) argues that specific rationales should not be stated in a definition as they greatly vary across nations and institutions. Third, some authors (van der Wende, 1997; Schoorman, 1999; Teichler, 2004) posit internationalisation either as a response or counter to globalisation. This is because globalisation has significant impact on higher education in general, which includes *inter alia* massification, the creation of a global labour market for scholars and the rise of English as a lingua franca (Altbach, 2015).

One definition that deserves special mention belongs to Rudzki (1995), who suggests that all universities are intrinsically international. The author argues that this 'priori nature' is necessary for a university to 'claim legitimacy' (p. 421) for their knowledge production, and thus it is contradictory for one to be provincial or national. This view is shared, although less strongly, by Maringe, Foskett and Woodfield (2013), who state that because all universities are international by nature, internationalisation is not about integrating but rather 'intensify[ing]' (p. 11) their international dimension. I do not wholly agree with these arguments; rather, I would concur with de Wit (2011a) that such position is misconceived. I would argue instead that universities are intrinsically international only in the sense that the knowledge they teach and produce should not be restricted to any border. This does not mean they are not national or even provincial in purpose and operation. On the contrary, universities are embedded in their national context, some being created to address national

issues (Scott, 2000). As a result, they bear features that are characteristic of their country of origin, and the specific knowledge they choose to teach and produce may serve first and foremost local needs even when such knowledge itself is internationally applicable.

There seems to have been no new definition from the late 2000s. Instead, the literature saw the emergence of alternative labels such as *mainstreaming*, *comprehensive*, *holistic*, *integrated* and *deep internationalisation*. These labels are in fact 'tautologies' (de Wit, 2013a, p. 26), using different words to refer to the same concept (e.g. internationalisation cannot be internationalisation without being comprehensive). This consequently causes a conceptual confusion without making much impact on practice (de Wit, 2013a). Therefore, this section will not discuss them in detail.

Work on conceptualising internationalisation was revitalised in 2011, when the International Association of Universities (IAU) called for a rethinking of internationalisation following its 3rd Global Survey conducted in 2009. This request arose out of eight reasons among which were the misalignment between the discourse and practice of internationalisation, the under-representation of non-western perspectives and the issues of values and ethics. Even though the initiative has not produced any new definition, it is an important reminder of the need to critically examine the internationalisation concept.

There is, however, another and very recent exercise that did result in a new definition. In 2014, the European Parliament commissioned a study to 'scrutinise internationalisation strategies in higher education, with a particular focus on Europe' (European Parliament, 2015, p. 2). The study drew data from 17 country reports both in and outside Europe, an analysis of digital learning and two major surveys (the IAU 4th Global Survey and the European Associate for International Education (EAIE) Barometer: Internationalisation in Europe). A Delphi Panel among experts in the field was also conducted to identify a future scenario for the internationalisation of higher education in Europe. The results were published in July 2015 and, based on the outcome of the Delphi Panel, included a revision of Knight's (2004) definition (revised parts are in bold):

> [internationalisation is] *the **intentional** process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, **in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society*** (European Parliament, 2015, p. 281)

This expanded definition emphasises that internationalisation should be planned ('intentional') and that its main purpose is quality enhancement and social engagement. Internationalisation must also be inclusive rather than 'elitist' (European Parliament, 2015, p. 29) by benefitting not just the mobile minority but all students and staff. Compared to the previous definitions, this one does not really add any new understanding to the concept, and

I would argue that its significance lies not in being a definition but a political commitment towards academic quality and the betterment of society via internationalisation. As a consequence, it neglects other rationales for internationalisation and the potential for internationalisation to be an unplanned, emergent process, especially at institutions where internationalisation is initiated from the bottom-up due to, for example, scholars establishing contact and collaborating with colleagues in other countries (see also Figure 2 in 2.1.3).

All the presented definitions show that even as a nascent concept in higher education research, internationalisation has become a locus for debate and that there is no single shared view of what it really is. That said, from the above discussions a working understanding of internationalisation can be drawn for the present study:

- First, internationalisation in higher education may occur at an organisational or national/sectoral level. This study locates internationalisation squarely at the organisational level.
- Second, internationalisation is not the organisation of discreet international activities but a process that integrates an international dimension into all aspects of a HEI. This has implications for my study in that it has to cover all component strategies of a university (e.g. teaching, research) if not the whole corporate strategy because internationalisation strategies can be integrated in any of them (see footnote 4 on next page and Section 2.2.1 for an explanation of component and corporate strategy).
- Finally, internationalisation is embedded in globalisation and national, even local contexts. This suggests any analyses of internationalisation strategies should take into account macro influences like globalisation forces and national policies. I wish to emphasise here, however, that my study does not examine internationalisation strategies *per se* but rather their reception and realisation by university members outside top management, namely deans, lecturers and students. In this way, I take the internationalisation strategies of the Vietnamese universities I investigate (see Chapter 3 for details of the research sites) as given and provide no analysis of them or the macro contexts in which they were conceived. That said, the empirical evidence of the strategies might still very well reveal influences by globalisation and the Vietnamese context.

Now that a working understanding of internationalisation has been established, I will turn to the reasons internationalisation has become a compelling strategic matter for universities.

### 2.1.2. Strategic significance

Internationalisation has long been considered a strategic issue for universities (Rudzki, 1995; Kehm & Teichler, 2007; Warwick, 2014) and recently a 'ubiquitous buzzword' (Brandenburg, 2016, Times Higher Education blog). Indeed, formally stated internationalisation strategies or the mention of internationalisation in corporate vision and mission can easily be found on the websites and promotion materials of many institutions, whether they are in the Northern

or Southern hemisphere, Eastern or Western, established education hubs (the US, UK and Australia) or not. Below are examples taken from six universities in these locations:

*Table 2*. Sample strategic statements of internationalisation

| University | Location | Role of internationalisation |
|---|---|---|
| Aarhus University | Denmark<br>(Northern hemisphere) | Part of corporate vision<br>One of the five component strategies[4] but apparently much more emphasised than the other four<br>Also integrated into the other four strategies<br>Source:<br>https://www.e-pages.dk/aarhusuniversitet/610/html5/<br>https://international.au.dk/fileadmin/int-strategi_FINAL_WEB.pdf |
| University of Sao Paulo | Brazil<br>(Southern hemisphere) | A strategic focus, especially in terms of rankings and cooperation<br>Supported by a dedicated provost and office<br>Source:<br>https://www6.usp.br/english/institutional/<br>http://www.usp.br/internationaloffice/en/index.php/institutional/about-the-international-office |
| University of Stuttgart | Germany (the West) | Part of corporate mission<br>One of the six strategic goals (arguably equivalent to a component strategy)<br>Also integrated into two other goals<br>Source:<br>https://www.uni-stuttgart.de/en/university/profile/mission/ |
| University of Malaya | Malaysia (the East) | Part of corporate vision<br>One of the seven component strategies<br>Also integrated into three other strategies<br>Source:<br>http://portal.um.edu.my/doc/canseleri/ppsg_upload/pelan%20strategik/UM%20Strategic%20Plan_2016-2020_07052018.pdf |
| University of Melbourne | Australia<br>(education hub) | Part of corporate vision<br>Integrated into three out of four component strategies<br>Source:<br>https://about.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/11694/Growing-Esteem-2015-2020.pdf |

[4] Note on terminology: A component or functional strategy can be understood in two ways: It can be a strategic area, a collective of specific strategies that are similar in purpose (e.g. finance, human resources), or it can be one of those specific strategies. This study draws on the former sense. For example, Aarhus University has five component strategies: research, education, talent development, knowledge exchange, internationalisation. The component strategy of research consists of three specific strategies: Increase the number of research areas in the international elite, focus on societal challenges and strengthen cooperation, attract more external funding (see pp. 30-33 of https://www.e-pages.dk/aarhusuniversitet/610/html5/)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| University of Technology Ho Chi Minh | Vietnam (non-education hub) | Part of corporate vision<br>One of the five component strategies<br>Also integrated into two other strategies<br>Source: http://www.khcn.hcmut.edu.vn/images/Bai%20viet/2017/TBChung/Chien%20luoc%20Truong/Chien%20luoc%20DHBK%202016-2020.pdf |

It would therefore be a challenge to find a university that does not strategically plan to become international or to expand its existing international dimension.

The strategic emphasis on internationalisation stems from the various benefits it brings to the HEI. These benefits, which can also be considered rationales, can be grouped under three broad categories: economic, academic and sociocultural (Knight, 1997; de Wit, 2002). First, economic benefits are considered the dominant rationale behind internationalisation (de Wit, 2011b), especially considering the immediate financial incentives that export activities, as a form of internationalisation, generate (de Wit, 2002). The most widely used form of export is the recruitment of international students who *inter alia* pay a higher fee for tuition and services (Maringe, 2010). Many American and European universities also consider internationalisation the solution to pressures from increasingly tighter financial conditions that they operate in (Davies, 1992).

Second, internationalisation can be used to enhance teaching and research and build capacity. It has been suggested that an international dimension can ward against parochialism (de Wit, 2002); that is, it helps the academic community avoid a narrow view of the world and think critically about the complex reality among nations and cultures. Where mobility is involved, internationalisation also allows students and faculty to broaden their learning and cultural experience in various contexts. Yet another major argument of the academic rationale is that internationalisation will enhance teaching and research quality, and lead to the achievement of international academic standards. This notion of standards, however, might be problematic because it raises the question of how and by whom standards are defined and, as pointed out by Knight (1999), the concern of a homogenising view on excellence in scholarship and research. Another reason for internationalisation is its contribution to the institution in the form of academic resources gained through international cooperation (de Wit, 2002). Institution development, however, may also relate to the competition for profile and status, the attainment of which (e.g., being top of an international ranking) is often controversially assumed to equate quality (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

Finally, sociocultural diversity can be promoted and preserved via internationalisation. Universities can become hubs where different ethnicities, cultures and languages mingle, thus nurturing intercultural understanding both between and within communities at various

levels (Ryan, 2012). This also enables them to offer the local community 'a forum for learning, research and social debate' (The Liaison Committee, 1992, in Knight & de Wit, 1995, p. 12). Equally important are the benefits internationalisation brings to the individuals, namely academics, staff members, managers and most importantly graduates. Engagement in intercultural activities enables them to gain valuable skills, including but not limited to language, communication, cultural sensitivity, all of which help them to develop as global citizens (Jones, 2013). This in turn prepares them to function well in a global labour market where such intercultural competence is increasingly a requisite.

While these three categories are not the only way internationalisation rationales can be conceptualised, they are chosen for providing clear framework for understanding why a certain HEI internationalises (Knight, 1997). The importance of answering the 'why' question for internationalisation cannot be understated, both in understanding and more importantly in putting the process into practice (Knight, 2008; de Wit, 2013b). At the very least, having clear rationales helps define the directions and final outcomes of internationalisation strategies as well as how they can be achieved, thus keeping them from being ad hoc and fragmented (de Wit, 2014). Additionally, the relative priority of these rationales may reveal what and whose values are attached to internationalisation (Knight, 2013). As a side note, internationalisation also carries a political rationale (ibid.), but this is more relevant to nations than HEIs (e.g. scholarships can be a foreign policy tool) and therefore excluded from this study.

### 2.1.3. The strategic management of higher education internationalisation

Given the strategic significance of internationalisation, it is no surprise that there has long been research into internationalisation as strategies and their management (Davies 1992; Taylor, 2004; Bremer, 2018). What is surprising, however, is that most of this body of works appears to engage little if at all with the vast literature on strategic management, and consequently the strategic dimension of internationalisation has been examined rather superficially. To begin with, there is a group of studies that invoke the word 'strategy' simply to advocate for and/or propose a planned approach to internationalisation, or to refer to empirical internationalisation strategies of particular HEIs (e.g. Knight, 2008a; Knight, 2008b; de Wit, 2011a; Ho, Lin, & Yang 2015). They do not utilise in any degree the theoretical resources of strategic management, thus lacking theoretical depth. For example, Taylor's (2004) study on four universities' internationalisation strategies refers to no strategy research and is very descriptive as it only presents and compares the content of these institutions' internationalisation strategies. Moreover, studies in this group tend to use the word 'strategy' ambiguously and confusingly. A clear example is Knight and de Wit's (1995) paper (see also Knight, 2008a), in which the authors suggest that in order to internationalise, an institution should implement two sets of strategies: programme strategies and organisational strategies (see Table 3 below). Many of their strategies, like 'articulated rationale' or 'academic support units', hardly fit any established conceptualisations of

strategy (to be discussed in 2.2.1) because they refer to no goals, plans or actions. I would argue that it is more appropriate to consider these as factors or structures to support internationalisation strategies. As a consequence, few insights into the strategic management of internationalisation can be gained from the group of studies under question, except the necessity of internationalisation as strategies (Knight & de Wit, 1995), some suggested strategies and success factors (Knight, 2008a), and empirical evidence of internationalisation strategies (e.g. Ho, Lin, and Yang (2015) describes internationalisation in Japan and Taiwan).

*Table 3*. Programme and organisational strategies (Knight, 2008a, p. 34)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **PROGRAMME STRATEGIES** | **Academic programmes** | Student/staff mobility programmes, international student recruitment, foreign language study, area of thematic studies, internationalisation of the curriculum, cross-cultural training, joint/double-degree programmes |
| | **Research and scholarly collaboration** | Area and theme centres, international research agreements, joint research projects, international conferences and seminars, publication activities |
| | **External relations: domestic and cross-border** | Domestic: Community-based partnerships with public, private or non-government organisations, community service and intercultural project work<br>Cross-border: International aid, cross-border delivery, international linkages, alumni-abroad programs |
| | **Extra-curricular** | Student clubs and associations, international and intercultural campus events, liaison with community-based cultural and ethnic groups, peer support groups and programs |
| **ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES** | **Governance** | Articulated rationale, recognition in strategic documents, expressed commitment by senior leaders, faculty and staff involvement |
| | **Operations** | Integration into institution-wide and departmental planning, budgeting and quality review, appropriate organisational structures, systems (formal and informal) for communication, liaison and coordination, balance between centralized and decentralized promotion and management, financial support, resource allocation |
| | **Services** | Integration into institution-wide service units (student housing, registrariat, fund-raising, alumni, information technology), academic support units (library, teaching and learning, curriculum development, faculty and staff training) and student support services for incoming and outgoing students (orientation programs, counseling, cross-cultural training, visa advice) |
| | **Human resources** | Recruitment and selection of international experts, reward and promotion policies, faculty and staff professional development, support for international assignments and sabbaticals |

A second group of studies do adopt a strategic management perspective but in a vague or auxiliary manner (e.g. Poole, 2001; Elkin, Farnsworth, & Templer, 2008; Jiang & Carpenter, 2013; Warwick, 2014). One example is Jiang and Carpenter's (2013) study of the issues in implementing internationalisation strategies at four British universities. The authors explicitly state 'strategy implementation' as a keyword and review several studies into facilitators and impeders of strategy implementation (pp. 5-6), but do not bring in these facilitators and impeders to discuss their own data. By comparison, Warwick's (2014) appropriation of the strategic management scholarship is much clearer: He provides an outline of the ideas and

concepts to be used, shows how they form his theoretical lens and later on involves them in data analysis. However, strategic management is not the central perspective. This is because his study is not exactly about the strategic management of internationalisation, but more broadly about how universities may initiate and manage internationalisation, of which strategic management is a key factor (a similar case is Neave, 1992):

> *This study* […] *employs a managerial lens to examine the internationalisation of UK universities. Three literatures are referred to: HE management, the internationalisation of HE and strategic management. Based on these literatures three major challenges to UK universities seeking to internationalise their activities are identified.* (Warwick, 2014, p. 92)
>
> [One of the challenges is] *a formal systematic approach to strategic management.* (p. 95)

Nonetheless, Warwick's (2014) synthesis of multiple literatures and clear appropriation of the strategic management literature are laudable. Indeed, I would argue that within this second group of studies, his study provides the most well-grounded insights into the strategic management of internationalisation. With that said, the second group of studies on internationalisation as strategies provide a lot more insights into the strategic management of internationalisation than the first one:

- The choice of internationalisation strategies tend to be highly opportunistic, but as strategies mature careful planning might be necessary. The management of these strategies is then an act of balancing between decentralisation, so that decisions are close to the action, and centralisation, so that oversight and coordination can be maintained. Internationalisation also requires managers to develop competencies in international business. (Poole, 2001)
- There is a positive correlation between having a strategic focus on internationalisation and achievement of internationalisation. (Elkin, Farnsworth, & Templer, 2008)
- There are eight impeders of internationalisation-strategy implementation: resource allocation, communication, operational process, cooperation and coordination, organizational culture, resistance of change, student support and external environment. (Jiang & Carpenter, 2013)
- Internationalisation strategies should be well resourced (including incentives), communicated to and from staff, monitored and adaptive. Top management should show on-going commitment to the strategies and exercise leadership. (Warwick, 2014)

Third and finally, in my survey of the higher education internationalisation literature I have been able to find only four studies that take strategic management as the central lens to examine internationalisation and do so in an indepth manner. The first two are conceptual papers by Davies (1992) and Rudzki (1995), both attempting to prescriptively model internationalisation strategies. Based on a very early study on academic strategy (Keller, 1983), Davies (1992) discusses three internal and three external elements that are essential to internationalisation strategies and incorporates them into a model that guides strategy

making. The three internal elements include (a) university mission, traditions and self-image, (b) assessment of strengths and weaknesses, (c) leadership and structure. The three external elements are (a) external perceptions, (b) evaluation of trends and opportunities, (c) assessment of competition. It can be seen that key ideas of strategic management, like internal and external analysis, competition, corporate-level mission are clearly present. His model is shown in Figure 1 below.

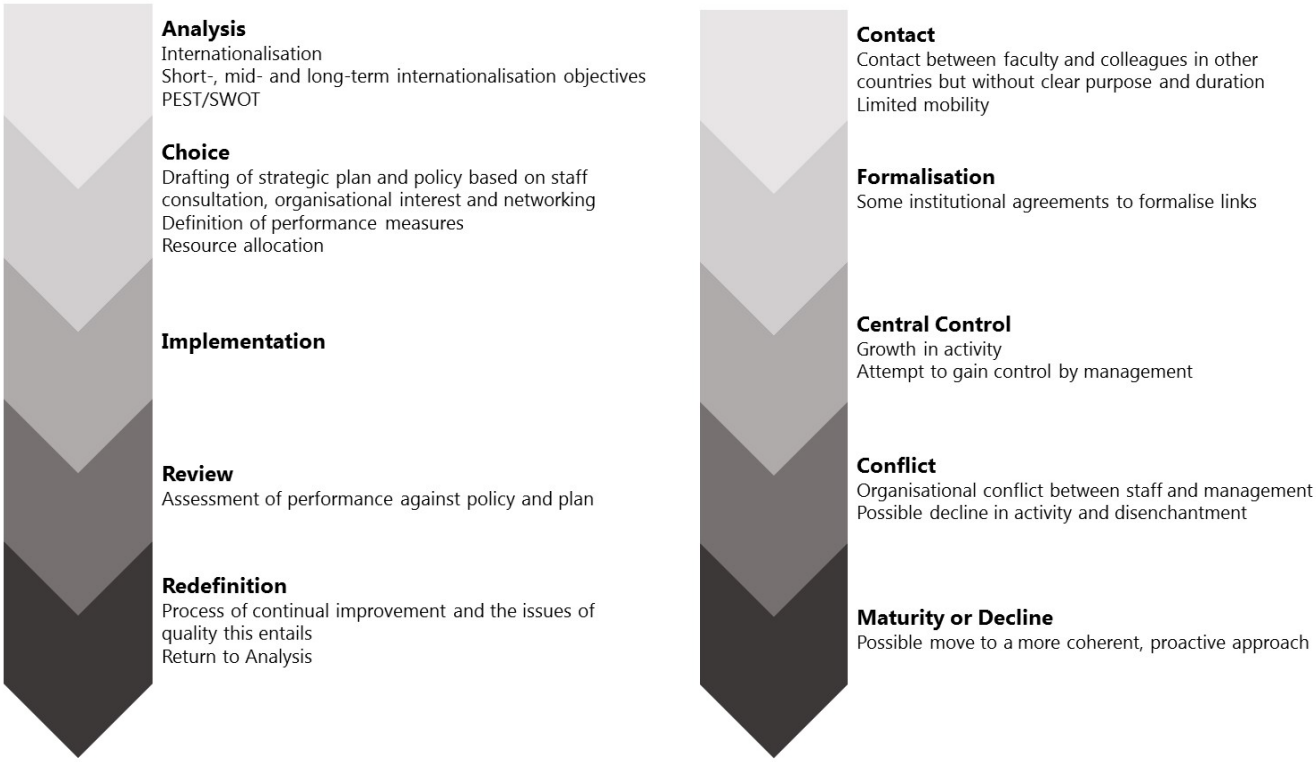
*Figure* 1. Elements of internationalisation-strategy making (reillustrated from Davies, 1992, p. 90)


By comparison, Rudzki (1995) draws inspiration from strategy process thinking (Pettigrew, 1992; Hutzchenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; also see Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2008, pp. 49-84 and 301-316) and proposes two five-stage models of how internationalisation strategies come to be and mature. The first model is called *pro-active*, which posits internationalisation strategies as planned, while the other is called *reactive*, in which internationalisation strategies are developed opportunistically. Apart from the fact that they are based on a well-established school in strategic management, the models themselves contain popular strategic management ideas and tools like PEST[5] and SWOT[6] analysis, strategic choice, resource allocation. Rudzki (1995) further notes that a reactive strategy may transform into a pro-active one when noticed and formally adopted by university management, which was proven by Al-Youssef (2010). Figure 2 below illustrates both models.

*Figure* 2. The pro-active (left) and reactive (right) models of internationalisation (reillustrated from Rudzki, 1995, pp. 437-438)

[5] Political, Economic, Socio-cultural, Technological

[6] Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

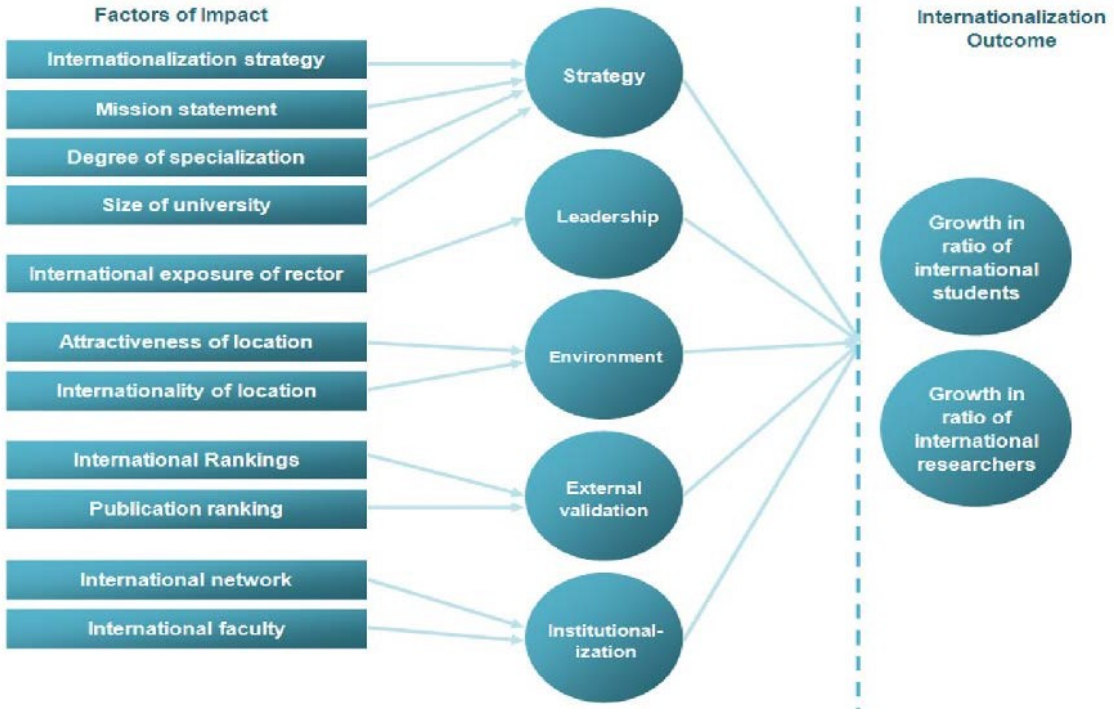



The other two studies of the third group, only very recently conducted, are empirical investigations into the choice and implementation of internationalisation strategies (Adel, Zeinhom, & Mahrous, 2018) and impact factors for internationalisation outcomes (Bremer, 2018). Adel, Zeinhom, and Mahrous (2018) report a case study of a partnership between an Egyptian and two British universities in order to examine how internationalisation strategies can be effectively managed. To this end, many strategic management ideas and tools are drawn upon, such as SWOT analysis, levels of strategy, Michael Porter's generic competitive strategies, resources. However, the authors' use of them is haphazard: No coherent outline of key concepts or explanation of their application is provided anywhere in the paper, especially at the start. Instead, the authors would report the case study and stop intermittently to analyse a certain block of data, where strategic management concepts are suddenly pulled in. Another, more serious limitation of Adel, Zeinhom, and Mahrous' (2018) study is that it is extremely descriptive and generates no theoretical insights, since the authors seem occupied with practical implications for the partnership studied. This is an unfortunate missed opportunity considering it is one of the very few studies into internationalisation from a strategic management perspective.

By contrast, Bremer's two-stage study (2018) exhibits none of these shortcomings. In the first stage, the author quantitatively analysed the impact of eleven factors, grouped into five categories, on the outcomes of internationalisation, specifically growth in the ratio of international students and researchers. The factors all emerged from his extensive review of the internationalisation and strategic management literatures, including the aforementioned

papers by Davies (1992) and Rudzki (1995). Figure 3 below illustrates all the factors, categories and relations with internationalisation outcomes.

*Figure* 3. Impact factors of internationalisation outcomes (Bremer, 2018, p. 18)




The factors were tested on 78 German public universities via survey, and the data collected was supplemented by official statistics. Key insights from the first stage are:

- Specialisation and university size facilitate internationalisation.
- Interestingly, having a mission statement may increase growth in international researchers as it 'signals' (p. 137) to them the relevance of internationalisation in a university.
- Internationality of environment (i.e. diversity in migrational background) does not necessarily support growth in international students. This happens when too many international students of the same nationality are enrolled.
- Developing more exchange arrangements with partners may reduce growth in international students because they overstretch resources.
- No significant correlation is found between the other factors and internationalisation outcomes.

The second stage was a qualitative investigation into the role and approach of university leaders in internationalisation. Interview data with six senior managers from German universities (rectors or presidents) was analysed using Leipzig Leadership Model (HHL Academic Press, n.d., available online), which conceptualises leadership as navigating the organisation within the four dimensions of purpose, entrepreneurial spirit, responsibility and effectiveness. As a side note, the model had been developed by scholars at the Leipzig Graduate School of Management (HHL), in close dialogue with executives and owner-managers from various companies; my literature search, however, has yielded no empirical

studies, at least in English, that are based on the model (apart from Bremer, 2018). That said, findings from the second stage show university leaders differ mainly in their purpose and degree of proactivity (entrepreneurship), which leads them to one of three approaches:

- Aspire to become a global leader, particularly in terms of international rankings. University leaders following this approach emphasise performance from academic staff and the adoption of latest technologies (e.g. massive open online courses) to enhance international visibility.
- Optimize the status-quo. University leaders of this type value scientific progress and believe that science is inherently international; therefore, a university does not need an 'imperative to internationalize' (p. 180) since doing science is in its nature.
- Aim at a niche. Leaders of smaller universities may pursue a niche that helps internationalisation, such as geographic location (e.g. being close to a border) or distance learning.

**dfc**

### 2.1.4. Looking beyond extant research and disciplinary boundaries

Extant internationalisation research that takes a strategic management perspective offers little guidance for my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies received and realised by non-leaders?* As can be seen from the literature review, all prior studies have focused on internationalisation strategies themselves and their success factors, which also means that their analysis is of meso (organisational) level. My study, by contrast, focuses on micro-level (individual and group) interpretation and activity of three specific groups of university stakeholders, namely deans, lecturers and students, with regards to internationalisation strategies. Briefly put, the matter of interest and level of analysis of my study are completely different from those of extant research. This indicates the need for more relevant and robust theoretical grounding.

Additionally, the mismatch between my study and extant research proves the study's originality and value to the literature. Indeed, I would argue that the intersection between higher education internationalisation and strategic management is an open, fertile field for exploration, due to (a) the scarcity of research positioned there, (b) the strategic significance of internationalisation to universities and (c) the theoretical resources afforded by the vast strategic management scholarship.

Given the reasons above, it is essential that I look beyond the confines of the higher education internationalisation literature and seek insights from the strategic management literature. This will be the mission of second half of the present chapter.

### 2.1.5. Higher education internationalisation: A summary

I have so far synthesised the various definitions of internationalisation in higher education over the past 20 years into a working understanding of the concept. Internationalisation is essentially a process of integrating an international dimension into all aspects of a university and is bounded in globalisation and the national, local contexts. I have also discussed the three rationales for universities to become international, namely economic, academic and sociocultural, thus demonstrating the strategic significance of internationlisation. Lastly, a review has been conducted of extant research on the strategic management of higher education internationalisation, which clearly shows the scarcity of such research and the originality of this study; moreover, the insights from previous studies, though valuable, are not relevant to my research question. For these reasons, it is essential for me to venture into the strategic management literature to find a robust theoretical grounding for this study.

## 2.2. Theoretical framework

In this section, the strategic management literature will be reviewed in order to develop a theoretical framework to address my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies received and realised by non-leaders?* Due to the vast stretches of strategic management (see Durand, Grant, & Madsen, 2017 for a field review), only works that are most useful to this study are included. Specifically, I will examine (a) the strategy concept and (b) how one particular theoretical-methodological approach in strategy research, called *Strategy-as-Practice* (SAP), is remarkably suited to the present study and therefore followed. Furthermore, because SAP in itself is not a theoretical lens for research, I will also (c) select and describe the lens to be used: Karl Weick's sensemaking theory. In fact, it is the appropriation of sensemaking theory that has helped refine my research question into *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?*, as mentioned in the Introduction chapter.

This section is structured as follows: First, a working understanding of strategy is developed from the writings of key theorists (2.2.1). A clear conceptualisation of strategy, I would argue, is the very first stepping stone to cross-fertilise higher education internationalisation and strategic management. It is perhaps due to a weak grasp of the strategy concept that Knight and de Wit (1995; also Knight, 2008a) propose very strange 'strategies' (refer back to 2.1.3). Afterwards, the SAP approach will be introduced and its application to this study explained (2.2.2). Finally, I will describe sensemaking theory and demonstrate how it provides the theoretical building blocks that guide data collection, analysis and theorisation (2.2.3). The refined research question, inspired by sensemaking theory, will also be presented.

### 2.2.1. Strategy: Plans, patterns and levels

The word 'strategy' is derived from the Greek words *strategos* and *strategia*, which respectively mean army leader and art of army leader. This early, military use of strategy

subsumes the ideas of setting objectives and planning different courses of actions to achieve them, taking into account the available resources (e.g. troops, weapons) and the environment (e.g. enemy's position, terrain). It was not until after World War II two millennia later that the strategy concept entered the field of management with the works of von Neumann and Morgenstern (1947) and Drucker (1954), who provide the very first management-related definitions of strategy (see Table 4 for all the definitions mentioned in this section). The decade from 1960 and 1970 saw the appearance of other pioneers in bringing strategy into an organisational context; notable names include Chandler (1962), Ansoff (1965) and Learned et al. (1969), whose ideas are now venerated in the strategic management literature. These early authors paved the way for great diversity in the conceptualisation of strategy as many more began to write about it, using different terms and highlighting different factors that they consider to be the essence of strategy. For instance, many associate strategy with goals, plans or actions (Glueck, 1976; Newman & Logan, 1971; Schendel & Hatten, 1972), while others describe it with words that denote a decision-making process (Steiner & Miner, 1977; Uyterhoeven, Ackerman, & Rosenblum, 1973). The essential properties of strategy can be resources (McCarthy, Minichiello, & Curran, 1975; Michel, 1976) or competitive advantage and performance (Barney, 1997; Porter, 1996) or organisation-environment fit (Schendel & Hatten, 1972). Strategy can be deliberate (Newman & Logan, 1971) or emergent (Hambrick, 1980; Mintzberg, 1987).

*Table 4*. Definitions of strategy

| Scholar | Year | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| von Neumann & Morgenstern | 1947 | a series of actions undertaken by a company according to a particular situation (pp. 79-84) |
| Drucker | 1954 | analyzing the present situation and changing it whenever necessary. Incorporated within this is finding out what one's resources are or what they should be. (p. 17) |
| Chandler | 1962 | the determination of the basic long-term goals of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of actions and the allocation of resources necessary to carry out these goals (p. 13) |
| Ansoff | 1965 | a rule for making decisions determined by product/market scope, growth vector, competitive advantage, and synergy (pp. 118-121) |
| Learned et al. | 1969 | the pattern of objectives, purposes, or goals and major policies and plans for achieving these goals, stated in such a way as to define what business the company is in or is to be in and the kind of company it is or is to be (p. 15) |
| Newman & Logan | 1971 | forward-looking plans that anticipate change and initiate action to take advantage of opportunities that are integrated into the concepts or mission of the company (p. 70) |
| Schendel & Hatten | 1972 | the basic goals and objectives of the organization, the major programs of action chosen to reach these goals and objectives, and the major pattern of resource allocation used to relate the organization to its environment (p. 4) |
| Uyterhoeven et al. | 1973 | [strategy provides] both direction and cohesion to the enterprise and is composed of several steps: strategic profile, strategic forecast, resource audit, strategic alternatives explored, tests for consistency and, finally, strategic choice. (pp. 9-10) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| McCarthy et al. | 1975 | an analysis of the environment where the organization is located and the selection of alternatives that will direct the resources and objectives of the organization, taking into consideration the risk and potential profits, and the feasibility that each alternative offers (p.19) |
| Glueck | 1976 | a unified, comprehensive, and integrated plan designed to assure that the basic objectives of the enterprise are achieved (p. 3) |
| Michel | 1976 | deciding which resources should be acquired and used so they can take advantage of opportunities and minimize factors that threaten the achievement of desired results (p. 246) |
| Steiner & Miner | 1977 | the formulation of missions, purposes and basic organizational goals, policies and programs to meet them, and the methods needed to ensure that strategies are implemented to achieve organizational objectives (p. 19) |
| Hambrick | 1980 | the pattern of decisions that guides the organization in its relationship with the environment, affects the processes and internal structures, and centrally affects the organization's performance (p. 567) |
| Porter | 1996 | creating a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities, making trade-offs in competing and creating fit among a company's activities (pp. 68-75) |
| Barney | 1997 | a pattern of resource allocation that enables firms to maintain or improve their performance (p. 27) |

Nevertheless, such diversity, as demonstrated in Table 4, makes strategy so broad that it paradoxically becomes a widely studied yet little understood concept (Ketchen, Boyd, & Bergh, 2008). The confusion surrounding strategy has been acknowledged in the literature (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012; Mainardes, Ferreira, & Raposo, 2014) and this motivated an extensive comparative analysis of 91 definitions originating from 1962 to 2008 by Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martin (2012). Using a quantitative approach, the authors found that over the evolution of the strategy concept 'firm', 'environment', 'actions', 'resources', 'goals' were its five core properties. Thus, despite the great number of definitions, organisational strategy remains relatively identical to its military roots. It should be noted that there are other comparative studies into the definitions of strategy (Bracker, 1980; Grant, 2008), but because they only investigate a small sample, they may not provide an adequate picture of the concept and are therefore not discussed in this section.

Among the five properties, 'goals' and 'actions' deserve further discussion because they relate to a long debate about the nature of strategy: Are (strategic) goals and actions deliberate? From a military standpoint, the answer is likely positive, and the notion that strategies result from human deliberation, in the form environment analysis followed by careful planning, is shared by a lot of strategic management scholars (e.g. Drucker, Chandler, Ansoff, Porter; see Table 4 above). A prime example is Porter's (1985; see also Porter, 1996) seminal book into competitive strategy, one of the most influential works of the field. The author proposes a model for analysing the industry(ies) in which a firm competes, consisting of five *forces*: intensity of rivalry, threat of new entrants, threat of substitutes, bargaining power of buyers and bargaining power of suppliers. He then suggests four *generic competitive strategies*, the choice of which is based on said analysis: cost leadership-broad

market, cost leadership-niche focus, differentiation-board market and differentiation-niche focus. The deliberate, prescriptive view of strategy by Porter and many others was questioned and challenged by another prominent strategic management scholar: Henry Mintzberg (see also Quinn, 1982). In his seminal 1987 paper *Five Ps for strategy*, Mintzberg argue that strategy is also *emergent*, coming into being out of 'a pattern in a stream of actions' (p. 12) by organisational members. One example provided by the author, though in a much later work (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2008), is how Honda entered the US market with no strategy but a desire 'to sell something' (p. 211) and then learned from their mistakes (the large motorbikes they wanted to market started to break down) while taking advantage of serendipities (the small motorbikes they did not want to market had to be pushed out and surprisingly became a huge success). Mintzberg concludes that an organisation possesses both deliberate strategies and emergent ones; simply put, it may develop plans for the future, but as it matures it also evolves patterns from the past. He also notes that no strategies are purely deliberate or emergent, because 'one means no learning, the other means no control' (p. 12).

Another important distinction between strategies is their scope or levels (Berd & Dess, 1981; Johnson et al., 2017). In large and complex organisations, like universities, not all strategies cover the same areas of activity (e.g. teaching, research, estate, internationalisation) or are within the remit of the same section, branch or department, both vertically (e.g. a faculty's strategies may be consistent but not same as the whole university's) and horizontally (e.g. two faculties may have different strategies). Thus, it has been recommended in the literature (ibid.) that strategies be classified into three levels:

- The *corporate strategy* lays out the vision, mission of the whole organisation and the businesses, in terms of product-markets, that it should be in. A whole university can be considered a corporate entity.
- If organisations are large enough to have multiple independent strategic business units (SBUs), each SBU might have its own vision, mission and competitive approach with regards to a relevant product-market. This is the *business strategy*. If a faculty in a university is autonomous enough to be a SBU, it might develop its own business-level strategy.
- *Functional* or *component strategies*[7] are concerned with, as the name suggests, a functional area (e.g. finance, human resources) that is essential for the organisation to operate in its environment. Functional strategies may exist at both corporate and business levels. Popular component strategies for universities include teaching, research, estate, human resources, internationalisation.

Regardless of levels, all strategies should be linked and well-integrated (Johnson et al., 2017). For example, the corporate strategy should address resource allocation and synergy between SBUs so that a whole corporate generates more value than the sum of its parts. At the same

[7] As noted earlier, a component or functional strategy can be thought of as either a collective of specific strategies that are similar in purpose, or those specific strategies. In this study it is used in the former sense.

time, a SBU's business-level strategy should contribute to the overall objectives of its corporate parent.

The five core properties of strategy, its dual deliberate/emergent nature and three levels provide a good theoretical basis to synthesise a working understanding of strategy for this study: Strategies are both plans and patterns of actions to achieve organisational goals at multiple levels, based on the surrounding environment and resources. This definition has three implications for the present study:

- First, my study focuses on internationalisation as a component strategy at the corporate-level (i.e. whole university). Therefore, even though my study may cover different faculties with their own internationalisation strategies, I consider them as part of the corporate-level internationalisation strategy.
- Second, in order to find out the internationalisation strategies of a given university, I should not only peruse formal strategic documents but also ask university members, especially those well-familiar with the institution, to identify and describe what the institution does to internationalise. This is because internationalisation strategies can be both plans and patterns.
- Lastly, although I acknowledge that the choice and implementation of internationalisation strategies are dependent on the environment and resources of a university, I will not examine this relation. As stated in 2.1.1, my study takes the internationalisation strategies of the Vietnamese universities I investigate (see Chapter 3) as given, because my concern is not the strategies themselves but how they are received and realised by deans, lecturers and students. What my study might nonetheless provide is empirical evidence of the environment and resources of said universities.

Having derived a working understanding of strategy, I will now introduce an approach to strategy research that is highly suitable for this study.

### 2.2.2. Strategy-as-Practice (SAP)

There are many approaches to researching strategy (see Furrer, Thomos, & Goussevskaia, 2008 and Gibbons, Scott, & Fhionnlaoich, 2015 for an overview), but the one taken in this study is SAP. SAP is a relatively recent theoretical-methodological approach in strategic management that focuses on the 'micro-level social activities, processes and practices' (Golsorkhi et al., 2015b, p.1) of strategy making and implementation. Its introduction could be attributed to Whittington's 1996 seminal paper *Strategy as practice*, but it did not emerge as a distinct sub-field of strategic management until the mid to late 2000s. Since then, SAP has become a movement to change how strategy is studied and gained currency with a dedicated website at *sap-in.org*, three books (one being published recently – Golsorkhi et al., 2015a), and numerous papers, workshops, conferences, all being backed by a fast-growing body of works, both theoretical (Fenton & Langley, 2011; Balogun et al., 2014; Seidl &

Whittington, 2014) and empirical (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2002; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Whittington et al., 2006). According to Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009), SAP develops partly out of the dissatisfaction with conventional strategy research which (a) predominantly focuses on the economic effects of strategy on organisational performance and (b) is methodologically preoccupied with multivariate statistical analyses (Golsorkhi et al., 2015b), consequently neglecting what actually takes place at the micro level of strategy work. SAP addresses this gap by drawing attention to the messy reality of strategy where people and their actions continuously shape and reshape strategy formulation and implementation; in so doing, SAP aims to generate new insights for strategic management while 'humaniz[ing] management and organization research' (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p. 70). In other words, SAP investigates what happens at the micro level of an organisation in order to understand the organisation itself. Accordingly, SAP draws upon a lot of theories in sociology and organisation studies that can explain micro-level activities and potentially link them with structures at the organisational or field, societal level (see Golsorkhi et al., 2015b for an overview); some examples are activity theory (Jarzabkowski, 2003), Bourdieu's practice theory (Gomez & Bouty, 2011) and sensemaking (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). In parallel, SAP is methodologically oriented towards the qualitative paradigm, adopting designs that are ethnographic (Kaplan, 2008) or based on case studies (Erkama & Vaara, 2010). That said, to accurately understand the tenets of SAP, it is essential to look at its treatment of strategy (S) and practice (P).

#### 2.2.2.1. Strategy (S) and practice (P)

SAP proposes that strategy is not something an organisation has, but what people do (Whittington, 1996). More specifically, strategy does not exist as an organisational 'property' (Golsorkhi et al., 2015b, p. 8); instead, it is constituted by the actions, interactions of organisational actors, the tools they use and the norms they follow, all of which can be condensed into the term *strategising*. A SAP researcher, for example, would investigate a strategy by observing how strategic meetings around it are conducted and analysing the impact of power dynamics between attendees on the content of said strategy. In this way, SAP differentiates itself from conventional strategy research on an ontological level as it reconsiders the nature of being of strategies. Given the SAP's ontology of strategy, it is easy to see why, as described earlier, this approach focuses on micro-level activities and leans towards theories from sociology and organisation studies, as well as the qualitative paradigm.

It is worth noting that SAP does not entail a redefinition of the strategy concept itself. The word strategy in SAP still refers to organisational goals and the plans and patterns of actions taken to achieve them. A critique I would have of the SAP literature is its tendency to discuss the strategy concept in such a way that the latter appears as if redefined. A clear example is a paper by Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007), in which the authors suggest strategy be redefined as 'a situated, socially accomplished activity' (p. 7). This is such a broad and vague

definition that strategy may refer to any and every activity in an organisation. The authors acknowledge this and, citing Johnson, Melin and Whittington (2003), clarify that

> *activity is considered strategic to the extent that it is consequential for the strategic outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage of the firm, even where these consequences are not part of an intended and formally articulated strategy* (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007, p. 8)

Their clarification ironically does not make the so-called redefinition clearer because it creates an almost tautological logic that 'strategy is an activity that has strategic consequence', thereby raising the question of what is *strategic*. The phrase 'an intended and formally articulated strategy' adds ambiguity since strategy here takes on the common meaning as plans and actions taken to achieve organisational goals. I would argue that the authors are not redefining the strategy concept as they claim to be, but merely trying to convey the SAP's ontology of strategy. Several other papers suffer the same problem (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Rouleau, 2013) in that their attempts to introduce the SAP's ontology are presented as a redefinition of the strategy concept.

I now turn to examining practice in SAP. While the strategy (S) in SAP denotes its broad ontological stance, the practice (P) refers to its various notions of practice, each associated with *inter alia* specific units of analysis (Rouleau, 2013). A cursory reading of the SAP literature might give the impression that practice simply means what empirically happens or, to a lesser degree, a way of doing something. Accordingly, SAP researchers would aim to study what actions organisational members perform in their strategy work or what procedures, routines and sociomaterial tools they draw on to accomplish what they do. These two notions of practice, however, do not represent the full extent to which SAP conceptualises practice (Orlikowski, 2015). In fact, when Rouleau (2013) conducted a review of the SAP literature (see also Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) with a particular focus on practice, she found at least five different notions, adopted by different SAP scholars. All five are summarised in Table 5 below:

*Table 5*. Five notions of practice in SAP research (adapted from Rouleau, 2013, p. 549)

| | **Practice as managerial actions** | **Practices as tools** | **Practice as socially embedded actions** | **Practice as resources** | **Practice as discourse** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Unit of analysis** | managerial actions | analytical, sociomaterial, technological tools | routine actions, conversations, interactions | organisational routines, capabilities | extra-organisational discourses |
| **Main methodologies** | interviews, shadowing, diaries | interviews, observation | ethnography | case studies | document analysis, interviews, observation |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Main contributions** | a lived account of managerial strategising | a stronger understanding of strategic tools and the skills involved in using them | a better understanding of contextual and hidden characteristics of strategising | a practice-based understanding of resources and capabilities | a critical understanding of the institutional role of strategy |

First, SAP research is concerned with situated, concrete actions of managers when formulating and implementing strategy. For instance, Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002) conducted a study on the top management team at Warwick University, UK and found that the team's nine members went to departments to communicate the institution's strategy and met fortnightly to discuss strategic issues. Balogun and Johnson (2005) chose instead to study those in middle management at a utility firm and how they tried to make sense of a restructuring by sharing stories, rumours, jokes and discussing their experiences with their peers. By staying close to managers and their actions, these and similar studies provide vivid insights into different situated, lived realities of managerial strategising or even more generally into strategy work as a profession (Whittington, Cailluet, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011). Perhaps more importantly, they can examine issues that are directly relevant to managers and therefore have great practical value. However, I would contend that top and middle managers should not be the only population of interest for SAP research. If SAP's ontology of strategy is to be wholly embraced, any organisational actors whose actions leave a strategic impact (e.g. by inducing immediate strategic change or creating long-term patterns of deviance) should be investigated, and this means moving beyond managerial ranks or even outside the organisation. The absence of such actors has been noted as a 'theoretical and practical deficiency' (Laine & Vaara, 2015, p. 624) and until now only few studies have investigated the strategising of non-managers, such as consultants (Nordqvist & Melin, 2008) or frontliners (Balogun, Best, & Le, 2015). The inclusion of non-managers would therefore be a logical and valuable next step for SAP in the quest to understand strategising; it might even stipulate a rethinking of what it means to be a strategist.

The second notion of practice, with practice usually in plural form, indicates the tools, procedures and routines employed to accomplish strategy. Whittington et al. (2006) studied three practices, namely management workshops, project management and symbolic artefacts and found that their use required practical, hands-on skills such as decorating the meeting room, positioning seats, making objects to communicate strategy. Johnson et al. (2010) also focused on strategy workshops, albeit from an anthropological perspective, and studied how their outcomes were influenced by ritualisation. Apart from strategy workshops (see also Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008), other explored practices include analytical tools (e.g., SWOT) (Jarratt & Stiles, 2010), visualisation (Eppler & Platts, 2009), presentation softwares (Kaplan, 2011) and discursive practices (Palli, Vaara, & Sorsa, 2009; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). The notion of practice as tools is of strong practical relevance since it helps better understand the use of specific practices and the skills required to use them effectively.

The third notion of practice shifts away from the empirical primacy advocated in the first two and applies sociological practice theories to studying strategy. Practice here is an array of activities, or routines, abiding by socially accepted rules and tacit practical know-hows, (Schatzki, 2001), and individual actions are shaped by and have the potential to shape practices (Giddens, 1984). Thus, the third notion of practice encompasses both the first one (actions) and part of the second (routines) but emphasises their social embeddedness. This understanding of practice arises from the practice turn in social science, ushered by the works of theorists like Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Theodore Schatzki, who use practice as the key concept to addressing a fundamental issue in social analysis: the relations between structure and agency. A detailed explanation of these authors' ideas is beyond the scope of this thesis (see Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001), but in general a practice approach to strategy research means that researchers should not focus on strategising actions as mere products of organisational actors' intent and capacity (i.e. their agency). Rather, it is essential these actions be placed and examined in relation to the prevailing practices of their social context because practices, serving as the realisation of social structures, influence actions and yet are produced, reproduced or transformed by them. The application of practice theories is one of the most notable features of SAP research. For example, Orlikowski (2000) used Giddens' structuration to study how technical support staff in a consulting firm interacted with *Notes*, a database software that also functioned as an e-mail system. Taking advantage of the cooperative norms of their group and their knowledge of *Notes*, the staff used the software's e-mail system to coordinate and schedule their activities; they also had discussions via databases, and some even created their own database design. Such use of *Notes* became recurrent and, in turn, reinforced the cooperative norms among technical staff and encouraged them to keep using the software. A Bourdieusian framework can be found in Gomez and Bouty's (2011) study of a French haute-cuisine chef. The authors demonstrated how his vegetable-based cooking style was transformed into a prominent social practice through the overlapping between his agency and the structure of haute cuisine at the time, reflected in the coalescence of the renown chef's actions, his *habitus* (personal dispositions developed via engagement in the field of haute cuisine), his understanding of, as well as position in this field. As a whole, studies that subscribe to the third notion of practice, though small in numbers, greatly help elucidate the hidden contextual, structural conditions that, through practices, mediate strategising (Rouleau, 2013).

SAP research, however, is not theoretically scaffolded solely by sociological practice theories. On the contrary, the field is characterised by 'a high degree of theoretical pluralism' (Golsokhi et al., 2015b, p. 12). In recent years, management and organisation theories have moved from a somewhat fringe and obscure position in many theoretical discussions (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Rouleau, 2013) to being highlighted in a dedicated chapter in the second edition of the *Cambridge handbook of Strategy as Practice* (see Golsorkhi et al., 2015a, pp. 283-430). As shall be seen shortly, the fourth notion of

practice ties in with one particular organisation theory: the *resource-based view* (RBV), which suggests that the competitiveness of a firm rests upon the application of its unique resources, both tangible (e.g. office layout) and intangible (e.g. employees' skills) (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). I wish to note that my study is also based on an organisation theory (sensemaking), but this will be discussed later on (see 2.1.4).

The fourth and fifth notions of practice are not strictly representative of SAP because they primarily emphasise a meso (organisational) and macro (extra-organisational, field, societal) focus rather than a micro one. The fourth notion of practice marks the intersection of SAP and RBV by suggesting that organisational actors, their actions, the tools they use and the procedures, routines they follow constitute the resources that sustain an organisation's competitive advantage (Regner, 2015). In this way, the fourth notion of practice also carries the first and second. Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor (2007) compared two divisions in a financial service company and found that the wider presence of coordination practices in one division was part of its unique resource configuration that made it more competitive. Elsewhere, Salvato (2009) found that capabilities (a similar concept to resources, see Barney, 1991) could be renewed or created by the ordinary, day-to-day actions of individuals within and around a design firm. The link with RBV brings SAP closer to the mainstream strategy literature, which has been mostly populated by RBV and capabilities research. However, this link might be problematic (Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008; Regner, 2015) because of ontological and epistemological disparities between the two views: SAP studies micro-level actors and actions while the meso scope of RBV is centred on organisational resources, though there have been some calls in the RBV literature to look at the micro (Alvarez & Barney, 2008; Barney, 2001). SAP also differs from RBV in terms of research goal, in that SAP aims to explain the doing of strategy whereas RBV, building on economics, is concerned with strategic outcomes and performance. Nonetheless, it would be hard to deny the potential of a SAP-RBV combination since strategising can a play a role in shaping resources and vice versa (Regner, 2015).

The fifth notion of practice purports that strategy itself becomes a socially accepted practice and idea (i.e. a discourse) that conditions how people think and act. This notion encourages a critical analysis of strategy to uncover its institutional influences on organisations and individuals. In a very early paper, Knights and Morgan (1991) argue that strategy is a pervasive mechanism of power that privileges certain individuals or groups who can participate in strategic practices. In the same vein, Dick and Collings (2014) conducted a study into an information and communications technology firm. Using discourse analysis, the researchers found that while one senior manager talked of strategy as the success factor of the organisation, his account actually undermined his high status as a strategist by portraying it as 'mundane and straightforward' (p. 1530). This finding demonstrates how strategy as a discourse, while bestowing authority upon managers, can also weaken it. Along with strategy, the field of strategic management, including SAP, has also become a locus for critique; for example, Carter, Clegg and Kornberger (2008) problematise the treatment of

strategy and practice in early SAP literature and call for more attention to the issues of power and identity, to which there have been several responses (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Rouleau, 2013).

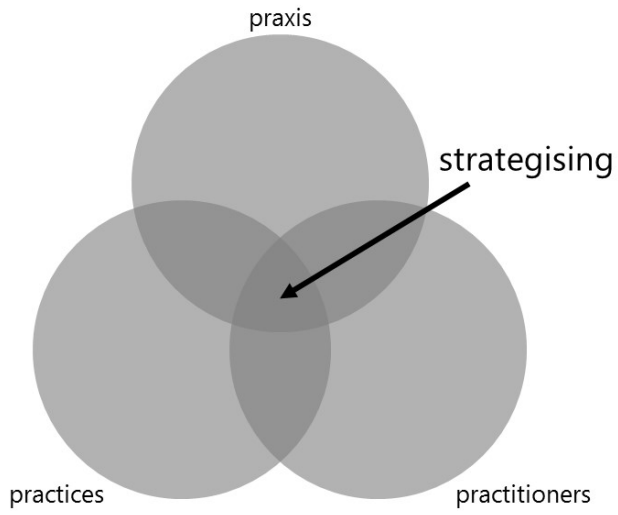
It is worth noting that the five notions above are not mutually exclusive and in fact may be combined in a single study. For instance, a study into the strategic actions involved in opening a university's branch campus abroad may also reveal the employed tools (e.g. SWOT analysis of the target country) and socially shared routines (e.g. laying down a red carpet in the grand opening ceremony).

With the key tenets of SAP established, I will now look at how SAP can be operationalised through three empirical foci: praxis, practitioners and practices.

### 2.2.2.2. Three foci for SAP research: praxis, practitioners and practices

Prominent SAP scholars propose a simple, tripartite framework for studying strategising: *praxis*, *practitioners* and *practices* (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Its main purpose is to provide various empirical lenses through which researchers can select what data to collect, as well as a common terminology for presenting and discussing findings. By extension, it facilitates the synthesis and review of past SAP works (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Stander & Pretorius, 2016). Below is an illustration and description of the framework.

*Figure 4*. Praxis, practitioners and practices




According to the framework, there are three broad foci for SAP research: Praxis refers to the flow of actions involved in the formulation and implementation of strategy; simply put, praxis

is the actual doing of strategy. Although by definition praxis is very diffuse, existing in many forms (e.g. talking, presenting) and carried out in different temporal and spatial settings, it can mostly be seen in episodes or sequences of episodes (Hendry & Seidl, 2003) such as meetings, workshops or projects (Whittington, 2006).

Practitioners are those who carry out praxis; they are the doers of strategy, the strategisers, or most commonly called, strategists. The position of practitioners has usually been limited to top managers in mainstream strategy research (Nag, Hambrick, & Chen, 2007), and SAP has helped expand the scope by studying other groups of organisational actors, especially middle managers (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Fauré & Rouleau, 2011; Mantere, 2008). However, as I have previously argued, practitioners can come from outside managerial ranks or the organisation.

Practices comprise the tools, procedures, routines that practitioners use in praxis. A key characteristic of practices is that they are socially embedded at various levels (Klein, Tosi, & Cannella, 1999, cited in Whittington, 2006): Practices can be organisation-specific; for instance, a company in Whittington et al. (2006) chose to use a special cardboard cube (Image 1) to communicate its strategy to employees. Practices can also exist on a field or societal level (e.g., SWOT analysis, presentation softwares).

*Image 1*. RetailCo's cubes (Whittington et al., 2006, p. 624)


It is clear that the tripartite framework best corresponds to the first, second and third notions of practice in SAP described in the last section. This is understandable because, as stated previously, the fourth and fifth notions respectively place strategising at the meso and macro levels, which are relevant to but not representative of the primarily micro orientation of SAP.

Even though the study of strategising would inevitably touch on all three foci in the framework, it has been suggested that a decision should be made on which focus or which overlapping area between two to be brought to the foreground for investigation

(Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Whittington, 2006). Such choice enables SAP researchers to generate precise explanations that are of value beyond the particular situation being studied (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007).

#### 2.2.2.3. Application of SAP in this study

Judging by the tenets and empirical lenses of SAP, it can easily be seen why SAP is a fitting approach to solving my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies received and realised by non-leaders?* Both the question and SAP are concerned with people's actions around strategies rather than strategies themselves. Moreover, SAP offers detailed guidance on how to study these the actions, including (a) the five notions of practice to narrow down the units and levels of analysis and (b) a tripartite empirical framework to narrow which aspect(s) of strategising for investigation.

Among the five notions of practice in SAP, the present study specifically incorporates the first two (actions and tools) and partly the third (sociological practice theory). To elaborate, my key interests are micro-level strategising actions and the tools, procedures and routines involved rather than meso-level organisational resources and competitive advantage, the broad discourse of strategy. In addition, while a sociological theory has not been used as my lens (see 2.2.3), I do account for the presence and impact of social structures on strategising, both in my empirical and theoretical findings.

My empirical lens revolves around praxis. That is, I seek to explore what different groups of university non-leaders think and do with regards to internationalisation strategies. Therefore, while data about the groups themselves as practitioners and their practices might be collected and woven into my findings, it only plays a supporting role to flesh out and illuminate data about their praxis. I will come back to which specific data was collected in Chapter 3.

Nonetheless, because SAP in itself is not a theory or methodology, the consideration and choice of an appropriate theoretical lens and methodology are also necessary for any SAP studies, including the present one. These are precisely the missions of the next section and Chapter 3, where I will respectively address the theoretical lens and methodology of this study.

### 2.2.3. Sensemaking theory

This study draws on a very popular theory in organisation studies and management: Karl Weick's sensemaking. As the name implies, sensemaking is a theory[8] of how meaning (or sense) is made of ambiguities in organisations, and how organisations emerge and are shaped due to meaning making. Sensemaking is also, unsurprisingly, the name of the central concept of this theory and has been commonly defined as a process (Weick, 1995; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Cornelissen, 2012) or sequence (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstefeld, 2005) through which people try to generate explanations for the ambiguity of organisational life. For the sake of clarity, the phrase *sensemaking theory* will henceforth be used to refer to the theory of sensemaking, in order to differentiate from sensemaking as a process. Sensemaking emerged as a matter of scholarly interest in the late 1960s via the works of Garfinkel (1967) and Weick (1969). Over the coming decades, sensemaking theory grew to become a dominant theory in organisation studies, and the theory itself has been developed in many ways. For example, sensemaking has been studied from both a cognitive perspective (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Elsbach, Barr, & Hargadon, 2005) and a social one (Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 2005). Research has also explored the link between sensemaking and narrative (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008), language (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995), embodiment and materiality (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012), or the role of sensemaking in crises (Christianson et al., 2009) and strategic change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). It is worth noting that most authors use sensemaking theory in a descriptive manner, as a lens to understand and analyse organisations, while Weick's version of the theory (1995, 2001) is more akin to an explanatory account of organisations – he appears to suggest that organisations emerge when people retrospectively make meaning of and rationalise their past collective actions, especially those taken in response to unexpected ambiguities. For example, workers of a factory might first spontaneously react to a fire (e.g. some run for extinguishers while others the fire escape), and afterwards look back at how they organised themselves during the fire and make meaning of their actions. This retrospection gives form to whatever organisation the workers created, albeit only temporarily, to deal with the fire.

Given the conceptual variation in sensemaking research, it is consequently a challenge to capture sensemaking theory. In fact, while the term 'sensemaking theory' has been invoked in the literature (Stein, 2004; Jensen, Kjaergaard, & Svejvig, 2009), some authors have avoided using the word 'theory' altogether. In his seminal 1995 book *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Weick describes sensemaking as a 'set of ideas with explanatory possibilities' that constitute a 'perspective' (p. xi, xii), which has been echoed in subsequent works (Sonenshein, 2009; Hsieh, Rai, & Xin Xu, 2011; Schultz & Hernes, 2013). Sensemaking has also been referred to as a 'lens' (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007) or 'framework' (Helms Mills, Weatherbee, & Colwell, 2006). Nonetheless, all variations of sensemaking theory practically share the same pool of theoretical ideas and vocabulary about organisational meaning making, albeit which ideas receive more attention vary among scholars. For example, some

[8] In this study, theory is understood in a broad sense, including not only explanatory or causal accounts of the social world but also concepts and ideas that provide a lens for understanding it.

are interested in the *discursive* aspect of sensemaking while others look at *sociomateriality* or *embodiment*. It is not my intent, therefore, to debate how sensemaking theory should be called; instead, 'theory' is used as an umbrella term for the ideas and concepts that together constitute the body of knowledge around sensemaking. Moreover, the version of sensemaking theory used in this study is mostly descriptive and serves as an analytical lens rather than a causal explanation as is the case with Weick's works (1995, 2001).

With all that said, this section will review the ideas that have enduring influence in the sensemaking literature and are key to understanding the theory. Towards the end of the section, I will discuss the application of these ideas, in combination with my focus on praxis (refer back to 2.2.2.3), to data collection, analysis and theorisation. Additionally, a refinement of the initial research question, stimulated by sensemaking theory, will be presented.

### 2.2.3.1. The nature and locus of sensemaking

It is essential to first examine the two different views about the nature and locus of sensemaking: the cognitive view and social view, which have clear implications for research (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Some sensemaking scholars approach sensemaking from a cognitive perspective, in which sensemaking is posited as a process that takes place inside people's minds (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Labianca, Gray, & Brass, 2000; Hahn et al., 2014). These scholars are interested in the development and use of *schemas*, cognitive frames or mental models (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995) in order to select and process *cues*, or information, gained from the surrounding environment (Elsbach, Barr, & Hargadon, 2005). Cornelissen (2012), for example, analysed 13 communication professionals' accounts of critical incidents and found that they constructed their sensemaking frames by using metaphorical language, which helped them explain the details of these incidents and negotiate between their roles and social expectations. By comparison, another group of sensemaking scholars hold a social perspective of sensemaking and locate the sensemaking process as between people (Sonenshein, 2010; Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). These scholars are less concerned with schema-based meaning production within people's mind and more with the dissemination, negotiation and contestation of meaning, conducted using narratives and discursive practices. For example, Sonenshein (2010) investigated a Fortune 500 retailer undergoing strategic change and found that managers created mixed, at times contradicting narratives about the change to get employees to accept it. The employees, however, did not simply absorb these narratives but used them as materials to construct their own sense, which then led them to accept, resist or champion the change.

It should be emphasised that the two ontological views of sensemaking above are not contradictory. Instead, they simply present different directions for sensemaking research that produce complementary insights into different aspects of sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015). Moreover, there have been calls and

attempts to bridge the cognitive and social views (Bean & Hamilton, 2006; Kaplan, 2008; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). For example, Kaplan (2008) develops a model of framing contests to illustrate how managers politically promote their schemas, out of an ethnographic study of a manufacturer dealing in communication technologies.

That said, it has strongly been recommended that sensemaking researchers articulate their ontology so that 'conversations about sensemaking […] are made more intelligible' (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 95); clear conceptualisation of sensemaking has also been argued for in the SAP literature (Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015) as it enables the formation of findings into 'a coherent whole' (p. 359). In response to this, the view of sensemaking taken in this study is a cognitive one. By locating sensemaking within the mind, the cognitive view is more likely to reveal the differences between the sensemaking of different groups of organisational actors. This perk is of value to addressing my research question, which covers different groups of university non-leaders, namely deans, lecturers and students.

On the matter of intergroup differences, it is interesting to see very little has been done to compare the sensemaking of various groups of organisational actors, as previous researchers have tended to investigate each group in isolation. For example, Prior, Keranen and Koskela (2018) study frontliners' sensemaking in complex procurements, while Balogun and Johnson (2005) study middle managers during strategic change. Furthermore, it is difficult to synthesise extant studies to identify intergroup differences because they vary in the application of sensemaking theory, research contexts and the subject of sensemaking (e.g. complex procurements, organisational restructuring). Therefore, a cognitive *and* comparative view like one taken in this study might prove valuable by generating insights into intergroup differences. For example, my study might reveal how various hierarchical positions (e.g. managers versus non-managers) or dependencies (e.g. students have to pay the university but lecturers do not) lead to divergence in sensemaking between groups.

My adoption of the cognitive view, nonetheless, does not mean a disregard for the social aspect or dimension of sensemaking. I would concur with Maitlis and Christianson's (2014) argument that sensemaking still contains a social aspect even when individuals construct meanings on their own because they do it in a social context and are thus influenced by the 'actual, imagined, or implied presence of others' (Allport, 1985, cited in Weick, 1995, p. 39). In my working ontology of sensemaking, I consider the social aspect as a set of factors (e.g. cordiality with colleague) that shape individual sensemaking.

Now that my ontology of sensemaking is established, I will review the key ideas of sensemaking theory. In accordance with the cognitive view, an emphasis will be placed on the mental processes and frames in meaning making.

### 2.2.3.2. The accomplishment of sensemaking: Trigger and episode

The sensemaking process begins when organisational actors encounter a trigger, in the form of ambiguities or violations of expectations. In extant literature, triggers are often unexpected and disruptive events that occur amidst people's flow of activity, like the collapse of a museum's roof (Christianson et al., 2009) or quite the opposite, the non-occurrence of anticipated events, such as the failure of a merger (Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012). Even planned and anticipated events, specifically in the context of strategic change, can be equally disruptive and trigger sensemaking because they likely involve dismantling the status quo and/or introducing new organisational structures and practices. In a study by Balogun and Johnson (2005), for instance, a strategic change intervention at a business division prompted sensemaking by breaking up the existing organisation into three new ones with expected new work culture and practices. Apart from disruptive events (unexpected or planned), triggers can also be gradual environmental shifts (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) and social or professional movements (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003), both of which present great ambiguity. Ambiguities and violations of expectations, nonetheless, do not necessarily trigger sensemaking by themselves; instead, it is the experience of them that, when significant enough, makes people seek answers (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Yet, such experience still cannot warrant sensemaking if it is accommodated, explained away or normalised (ibid.). A notable example is the foam shedding during space shuttles' flight at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) (Vaughan, 1996; Dunbar & Garud, 2009). Over time this potentially dangerous phenomenon was normalised from an anomaly to an expected occurrence and therefore did not trigger sensemaking, which eventually led to the Columbia disaster.

An interesting commonality among the types of triggers outlined above is that they emerge during relatively defined periods of time or episodes, whether immediate or protracted, where great ambiguity is found. Therefore, the trigger is tangible if not rousing, and the ensuing sensemaking is done with intent and attention. Indeed, most of the sensemaking literature, including Weick's (1995) seminal and founding work, appears to postulate that sensemaking only happens during disruptive episodes and in a conscious manner (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). This episodic and explicit nature of sensemaking has been called into question very early on by Gioia and Mehra (1996) and recently by Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015). These authors argue that sensemaking can be about the mundane, routine organisational reality around the sensemaker, where conscious efforts are not demanded:

> *We argue that unconscious meaning-making should have a place in the sense-making formulation. Otherwise, we are left with the perverse suggestion that routine organizational life is somehow devoid of sense merely because it is marked by an absence of conscious information processing.*
> (Gioia & Mehra, 1996, p. 1229)

> *We identify the main limitations of the sensemaking perspective […] the exclusive focus on disruptive episodes at the expense of more mundane forms of sensemaking.* (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. 86)

Brown, Colville and Pye (2015) also briefly call for exploration of the mundane rather than 'crisis-led sensemaking' (p. 272). Despite these calls, my review of the sensemaking literature has yielded scant empirical work into implicit sensemaking of the mundane. The clearest one is a recent by study by Balogun, Best and Le (2015) into how tour guides at two British museums made sense of daily situations at work. That said, I echo Gioia and Mehra (1996) and Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) that it is necessary to account for implicit and mundane sensemaking, for the simple reason that the mundane, routine organisational reality already contains ambiguities that organisational members have to sort out in order to orient themselves, accomplish their roles and function with other members (see the literature on socialisation, e.g. Madlock & Chory, 2014; Ellis et al. 2015). I would also speculate that the trigger for implicit and mundane sensemaking is not as strong or tangible like that for explicit, episodic sensemaking.

### 2.2.3.3. The accomplishment of sensemaking: Schema, cue

From a cognitive view, once triggered sensemaking is accomplished by applying schemas to extract and interpret cues from the surrounding environment (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Hahn et al., 2014). To begin with, schemas are 'filters that admit certain bits of information into the strategizing process while excluding others' (Porac & Thomas, 2002, p. 178) and 'template[s]' to organise and give them 'form and meaning' (Walsh, 1995, p. 281; also Weick, 2010). Ultimately, schemas can be considered 'data reduction devices' (Balogun, 2007, p. 83) that facilitate the sensemaking and navigation of complex organisational life. In the sensemaking literature, schemas have come in different names, including cognitive frames (Kaplan, 2008), mental models/frameworks (Malakis & Kontogiannis, 2013) or interpretative schemes (Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012), all of which refer to practically the same concept as defined above. Schemas are the product of learning from past organisational events and experiences (Balogun, 2007), which are remembered as patterns of meaning and emotion (Strauss, 1992, in Morandin & Bergami, 2014). Consequently, schemas may cause 'confirmatory bias' and 'stereotypic thinking' (Hahn et al., 2014; p. 465) because they select cues that fit existing knowledge; however, they can be updated with new cues, but this is difficult and might require intentional efforts from other people to provide cues that undermine or disconfirm one's prior learning (Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012). The complexity-reducing function of schemas and their biased selectivity make them a key concept for sensemaking scholars who are interested in managerial decision-making (Sleegers et al., 2009; Winch & Maytorena, 2009; Hahn et al., 2014) and strategic change (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Bean & Hamilton, 2006; Mantere, Schildt, & Sillience, 2012). For example, Sleegers et al. (2009) explore the impact of professional background on school leaders' framing of and solution to complex problems like decreasing enrolment and the possibility of merger. Elsewhere, Balogun and Johnson (2004) study the change in schemas of middle managers when they are faced with top-down restructuring. Outside managerial

decision making and strategic change, however, the role of schemas appears under-researched, so little is know about, for example, how non-managers' schemas shape their attitude and actions towards daily responsibilities.

Cues are the 'bits of information' (Porac & Thomas, 2002, p. 178) that are filtered and interpreted with schemas. Cues and schemas are thus inseparable because one cannot be effective without the other; indeed, they are compounded in Weick's (1995) discussion of how sensemaking is 'focused on and by extracted cues' (pp. 49-55), where he addresses '[the] ways people notice, extract cues, and embellish [them]' (p. 49). It is therefore surprising to see that while schemas have been the focus of many scholar (see the last paragraph), little research has been done into cues, and even schema studies seem to assume cues as a given element of sensemaking. When mentioned, the word 'cues' is usually substitute for 'bits of information' and thus the concept becomes reduced to an indistinct, singular label; on top of this, the source of cues is often only an indistinct, singular 'environment' (e.g. Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 67; Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2015, p. 267). For example, many cue sources can be seen in Balogun and Johnson's (2005; see also, Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) study of middle managers' schema change during a restructuring: videos, vision workshops, daily work in new positions, interactions with other middle managers. However, the authors themselves offer no analysis of the sources or cues extracted from them, such as why vision workshops were organised or what the middle managers gained from them. Nonetheless, there is a group of studies that examine cues in terms of their physical nature, although only implicitly; these are studies about sensemaking devices, such as narratives (Sonenshein, 2010), metaphors (Nicholson & Anderson, 2005; Cornelissen, 2012), artifacts (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012), technology (Kaplan, 2011), bodily senses (Cunnliffe & Coupland, 2012), emotions (Liu & Maitlis, 2014). It can be inferred from them that cues may exist as language, sociomateriality or physio-psychological stimulation. Only very recently have cues become an explicit interest for sensemaking scholars: Gacasan, Wiggins and Searle (2016) conducted two studies on construction project managers in Australia and found they relied types of cues, namely feedback, context and tacit knowledge to make sense of critical incidents. Svensson and Hallgren (2018), on the other hand, found that Swedish emergency call operators paid more attention when noticing incongruence between verbal and non-verbal cues in a call.

### 2.2.3.4. The accomplishment of sensemaking: Actions, enactment and retrospective future

To really accomplish sensemaking, organisational actors rely on more than extracting and interpreting cues – they have to take actions. Indeed, actions are instrumental to sensemaking because they generate 'raw ingredients' (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 84) for the process and moreover, test previously made senses by providing feedback (Daft & Weick, 1984; Weick, 1988). Simply put, people can learn about something by taking certain actions (e.g. experimenting), interpreting the results and afterwards taking further actions to

test their understanding. It is also actions that separate sensemaking from mere interpretation (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Because of actions, the sensemaker alters the very situation that triggered sensemaking and thus the actions themselves in the first place; more broadly speaking, actions shape the environment that people make sense in. Such reciprocal influence between actions and the environment during sensemaking is captured in the concept of *enactment*, or 'the process in which organization members create a stream of events that they pay attention to' (Orton, 2000, p. 231). Walsh and Bartunek's (2011) study provides a good example; it shows that employees' early attempt to make sense of the impending closure of their firms led them to launch campaigns to save these organisations, and then when these failed to change the situation, they had to jointly contemplate other options and eventually opened their own ventures, which triggered yet another sensemaking process around the identity of these new organisations. Taken to an extreme, enactment becomes self-fulfilling prophecies when people's arbitrary assumptions can make them enact a reality based on these assumptions (Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015). This was demonstrated by the Scottish knitwear community of Hawick in the late 80s (Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 1989) where the managers' own beliefs about the competition guided the strategic decisions and behaviours that shaped the industry, and in turn, this enacted reality reinforced their original beliefs.

Actions and enactment are related to a long-debated matter in sensemaking theory: sensemaking about the future. In his seminal work, Weick (1995) asserts that sensemaking is always retrospective because it can only be done of transpired events and the actions taken during those events. Therefore, actions precede interpretation, and there is no boundary between enactment and sensemaking, as famously said by Weick: 'How can I know what I think until I see what I say? […] we are always a little behind [actions]' (p.18, 26). The retrospective nature of sensemaking causes an interesting problem when the purpose of sensemaking is not to reflect on the past but to prepare for or predict the future: How can the future be made sense of? Weick's own argument is that people do so in future perfect tense (1969; Gioia, Corley, & Fabbri, 2002; Gioia, 2006); that is, they envision a future state and 'act as if [it] has already transpired' (Gioia, Corley, & Fabbri, 2002, p. 623). Many authors have critiqued this notion of retrospective future sensemaking (MacKay 2009; Gephart, Topal, & Zhang, 2010; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015) by questioning its feasibility under circumstances of great complexity and ambiguity or when the sensemaker is unclear about his/her aspirations. I would add to their critique that if future sensemaking is indeed retrospective, how can the hypothetical future state be created to begin with (in enough detail, to add) for retrospection, if not through some form of genuinely *prospective* sensemaking? Gephart, Topal and Zhang (2010), in particular, offer a nuanced solution to the retrospection/prospection debate about future sensemaking by proposing that future sensemaking can be prospective but is based on and contextualised by retrospective sensemaking of the past and present, where actions and enactment have occurred. On a more practical level, Smerek (2013) says that while retrospective sensemaking may be true in emergency situations (recall my earlier discussion about disruptive episodes), it is

'unacceptable and unthinkable' (p. 396) for those in decision-making and high-discretion roles, like a president or CEO, not to think prospectively before acting.

### 2.2.3.5. The constraint of sensemaking: Politics and institutions

A shortcoming of sensemaking theory, whether cognitive or social, is that despite its address of organisational meaning making, not enough attention is given to politics (and power) and institutions. Politics and especially institutions have been in fact a long-standing gap in the sensemaking literature (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Hope, 2010 Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2015). This makes sensemaking appear a 'subjectivistic' (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. 20) and 'hyper-agentic' process (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 98) where the sensemaker possesses full ownership of every meaning and is free to enact it. The past decade, however, has seen increasing endeavour to explore politics in sensemaking, both conceptually and empirically (Brown, Stacey, & Nandbakumar, 2008; Hope, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2011; Whittle et al., 2016). More specifically, sensemaking scholars have investigated the contestation of meaning and narratives (Brown, Stacey, & Nandbakumar, 2008; Vaara & Tienari, 2011), political actions taken to shape others' meaning (Hope, 2010; Filstad, 2014), and the impact on power perception on one's own sensemaking (Frieder, Ma, & Hochwarter, 2016; Whittle et al., 2016). For example, Vaara and Tienari (2011) studied a cross-border merger of financial services and found three types of antenarratives, or 'fragmented pieces of discourse' (p. 372), being competitively mobilised to legitimise or resist the merger. Hope (2010) did a smaller-scale study into politics, in which the researcher looked at the various power tactics and power sources used by middle managers of an insurance company to influence sensemaking in multiple directions (upwards to senior managers, laterally to peers, downwards to subordinates).

Compared to politics, institutions are a much less researched topic. My survey of the sensemaking literature has yielded very few studies into this matter, including a conceptual paper by Weber and Glynn (2006) and an empirical study by Schultz and Wehmeier (2010). That said, Weber and Glynn (2006) offer a very detailed framework for thinking about and studying the impact of institutions on sensemaking. According to the authors, institutions can prime, edit or trigger sensemaking: First, institutions direct or prime sensemaking by providing a limited and specific repertoire of meanings that serve as a schema for selecting and interpreting cues; these repertoire can be thought of as 'ready-made clusters of actors, situations and actions' (p. 1649). Second, institutions may indirectly edit the meaning of past actions. Due to its priming effect, institutions shape the expectations and thus judgement of other people towards one's actions; as a result, should these actions violate their expectations, they might provide negative feedback that compels the perpetrator to reassess what he/she has done. Third, institutions themselves can trigger and become a subject of sensemaking. Schultz and Wehmeier's (2010) study, by comparison, does not deal with institutions but rather institutionalisation. The author found that the institutionalisation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in an energy company involved internally translating the

concept and legitimising the company's implementation of CSR. The special feature of Schultz and Wehmeier's (2010) study is that it posits a whole organisation as the sensemaker, rather than individuals as commonly found in the sensemaking literature. However, the appropriation of sensemaking theory in the study appears superficial: The authors often invoke the word 'sensemaking' without mention of its key concepts or explanation of its application except that meaning making and actions are intertwined.

### 2.2.3.6. Application of sensemaking theory in this study: Compatibility with SAP and refinement of the research question

Given the primary focus of sensemaking theory on the micro-level of organisational meaning making, it is not difficult to see its compatibility as a theoretical lens for SAP, and indeed sensemaking is one of the most frequently mentioned organisation theories in the SAP literature (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Kaplan, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Balogun et al., 2014). However, the theory has not been employed to its full potential in SAP research. Cornelissen and Schildt (2015) did a review of sensemaking-informed SAP studies and observed that a striking feature among many was the use of sensemaking not as a theory but a 'shorthand or label' (p. 350) for empirical instances of thinking and talking where individuals or groups tried to understand a strategic issue (Rouleau, 2005; Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013; Kwon, Clarke, & Wodak, 2014). The authors further argue that SAP research should move beyond this empirical application of sensemaking to better utilise the ideas that this theory offers, which would enable SAP research to be more specific in its explanations of the subject matter, as well as its theoretical claims. It is of course this theory-laden stance that I will take when using sensemaking theory in my study.

Besides SAP, sensemaking theory fits perfectly with my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies received and realised by non-leaders?* because it addresses both meaning making (reception) and actions (realisation). In this way, the adoption of sensemaking theory as theoretical lens has also inspired a refinement of the research question, in which *reception* and *realisation* are combined into the single concept of sensemaking:

*How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?*

This refinement makes the phrasing of the research question more theoretically precise and also representative of the theoretical lens of my study. I would argue, therefore, that the refined research question is much more useful not only to myself but also potential readers, especially those interested in a SAP study of university internationalisation strategies or the application of sensemaking theory in a university context. With that said, I will now discuss the application of sensemaking theory, in combination with my praxis focus (refer back to 2.2.2.3), to this study.

### 2.2.3.7. Application of sensemaking theory in this study: Sensemaking praxis and theoretical building blocks

The integration of SAP and sensemaking theory in this study is as follows. First, my focus on praxis in the SAP framework (see 2.2.2.3) means that most of the data collection, analysis and theorisation is centred on the flow of thinking and actions, or praxis, of university non-leaders when they make sense of internationalisation strategies. The tools, procedures and routines they use for sensemaking (practices), as well as their own attributes (practitioners), play a supporting role to elucidate sensemaking praxis. Moreover, a SAP approach necessitates accounting for the presence and impact of social structures (e.g. politics and institutions) on sensemaking.

Sensemaking theory itself, in turn, provides four key concepts for guiding data analysis and theorisation: trigger, schema, cue and enactment. To elaborate, the research question, as of now refined, is answered by looking at the triggers of university non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies, the schemas and cues involved and the actions taken. Moreover, the associated issues of these four concepts, such as sensemaking of the mundane and prospective future sensemaking, and potential political and institutional constraints on sensemaking are bore in mind during analysis and theorisation.

## 2.2.4. Theoretical framework: A summary

In this section, I have established a theoretical grounding for the present study by moving beyond the higher education internationalisation literature and incorporating the strategic management literature. First, the strategy concept has been delineated using ideas from key theorists in strategic management: Strategy is both plans and patterns to achieve certain organisational goals and exists in multiple levels. Second, the SAP approach to strategy research, chosen for this study, has been described in terms of its tenets, three empirical foci (praxis, practitioners, practices) and application in my particular case. Finally, I have talked about sensemaking theory and its role as the theoretical lens guiding data collection, analysis and theorisation. I have also demonstrated its strong fit with both the SAP approach and my preliminary question, and how it has inspired the refinement of the research question.

## 2.3 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literatures on higher education internationalisation and strategic management in order to position my research and establish the theoretical grounding for resolving the research question. The first half of the chapter has defined the concept of internationalisation in higher education and demonstrated its strategic significance to universities. More importantly, the paucity and theoretical shortcomings of extant research into higher education internationalisation as organisational strategies were

identified, thereby highlighting the value of this study and the need for higher education internationalisation research to engage more substantially with the strategic management literature. The second half of the chapter has defined the strategy concept and demonstrated how my research question can be addressed with the SAP approach in strategy research and sensemaking theory. In so doing, this chapter has also outlined several gaps and points of debate in SAP and sensemaking theory themselves, such as the obscurity of frontliners in SAP research (2.2.2.1) or the episodic nature of sensemaking (2.2.3.2). That said, I will now turn to how this study, as a piece of sensemaking-informed SAP research, is operationalised via a qualitative, comparative case study design.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to answer my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* The question required a methodology that would lend itself to indepth scrutiny of organisational dynamics and thus an opporunity to investigate an integral aspect of organisational life that is sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstefeld, 2005). The need for such methodology was further affirmed by my adoption of the SAP approach and sensemaking theory, both focusing on fine-grained, micro-level activities. Additional to this was the exploratory nature of this study, since very little research had been undertaken into the topic or more generally had cross-fertilised higher education internationalisation and strategic management (refer back to 2.1.3, 2.1.4). For these reasons, my study leaned towards qualitative research, and a comparative case design was chosen (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2018). The fact that my choice of methodology, and theoretical framework for that matter, was entirely driven by the research question rather than certain ontological and epistemological beliefs also reflects my paradigmatic stance of pragmatism (Morgan, 2007; Creswell, 2013, 2014).

My case study design involved two universities in Vietnam that had explicit internationalisation strategies, one being private and the other public. Within these HEIs, four types of data were gathered using five methods: individual interview, focus group, document analysis, campus visit and social media analysis. The data was then analysed through a four-stage process of holistic exploration, single-case thick description and coding, cross-case comparative analysis and finally theorisation. This process was inspired by the tradition of *first* and *second order* analysis (Van Maanen, 1979; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Balogun & Johnson, 2005) in combination with Eisenhardt's (1989) theory building process for comparative case studies. Issues of ethics and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004) were also carefully observed throughout data collection and analysis.

There were two unanticipated problems arising during fieldwork that could have very well put this study in jeopardy. The first was an ownership dispute at the private university that led to legal actions and the swift dismissal of all senior and middle management, many of whom were interview targets. The dispute occurred very shortly after the onset of my fieldwork there and presented me with a critical decision of whether to abandon the case. The second was a compound of access difficulty and operational timing at the public university. Securing access to this university took much longer than that to the private one, and immediately after my access, a series of student recruitment activities involving all faculties were organised, followed by semester exams and summer vacation. Fieldwork was consequently conducted in the unfavourable conditions of a sparsely populated summer campus. In the end, I decided to persevere with both, but participant recruitment and data

collection had to be dramatically changed. The methodology was therefore not executed as planned at all, which interestingly epitomises the idea of emergent strategy discussed in Chapter 2 and provides a vivid case of (research) strategy as *practiced*. The problems and my response will be elaborated in detail later on in this chapter.

The methodology chapter contains seven sections. First, my paradigmatic stance will be made explicit to lay the background for the whole methodology (3.1). My comparative case design is then described (3.2), including the selection criteria for cases and the four types of data I sought from them. Afterwards, I will introduce and explain the choice of context: Vietnam and the city of Saigon (3.3). This is followed in Section 3.4 by a report of how two Vietnamese universities were chosen as cases, based on the criteria in 3.2, and how participants were then recruited from them. Section 3.4 will also recapture the problems I was faced with during fieldwork at both universities. In the next two sections, I will respectively detail how data was collected (3.5) and analysed (3.6). Finally the issues of ethics (3.7) and trustworthiness will be addressed (3.8).

## 3.1. Paradigmatic stance

The present study and, to a greater extent, my paradigmatic stance can be identified as belonging to the pragmatism paradigm, especially the ideas put forward by Morgan (2007). Here I refer to paradigm in the sense of 'shared beliefs and practices' within a community of researchers (p. 55) for thinking about and doing social research, rather than the more popular metaphysical sense of ontological and epistemological assumptions. In this way, paradigm subsumes the choice of questions and appropriate methodologies, which may or may not involve the examination of the researcher's ontology and epistemology. With that said, my paradigmatic stance strongly resonates pragmatism, in that

- My methodology and in fact the whole design of this study revolved around the research question, not metaphysical assumptions (Creswell, 2014). The greatest concern was to find and/or develop a theoretical lens, research design and data collection and analysis techniques that would address the question – in other words, to make the question 'workable' (Morgan, 2007, p. 66).
- In conjunction, I was and am not committed to any ontological or epistemological positions (Creswell, 2014), nor do I believe in the methodological prescription that such positions might present (see, e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This does not equate a complete disregard of metaphysics for me as a researcher, but rather I do not adhere to any traditions and thus limit my research to certain topics, perspectives of a topic or methodologies.

Given the pragmatist attention to research outcomes (Cherryholmes, 1992), I would suggest that pragmatism offers an attractive response to two particular aims and challenges of SAP

research: (a) to provide informants, especially strategy practitioners, with insights that serve their organisational needs, and consequently (b) to elicit willingness and commitment from them to involve themselves as informants (Balogun, Huff, & Johnson, 2003). Assuming the research question covers matters of interest to practitioners, pragmatist researchers would be well placed to benefit and engage them because they can choose a methodology that best addresses those matters without the potential constraints by metaphysical assumptions. This also means that the resulting findings can facilitate 'human problem-solving' (Powell, 2001, p. 884) without the need to account for the nature of reality and truth, which is unlikely to be the concern of practitioners.

Being a pragmatist, therefore, I exercised 'freedom of choice' (Creswell, 2013, p. 28) and a little eclecticism in this study, combining different methodological ideas from various methodologists in social science and management and organisation studies in a way that, to me, was best for the question. For example, the relation between theory and data was both top-down and bottom-up: I had a clear theoretical framework based on a specific conceptualisation of strategy and application of SAP and sensemaking theory (refer back to 2.2) to guide data collection and analysis, and yet at the same time any collected data informed the collection of further data, and themes emerging from the data that did not quite fit my theoretical framework were not discarded or forced into the framework (to be elaborated in 3.6). I strongly believe that such a pragmatic approach has helped enriched this study both empirically and theoretically. With that said, while pragmatists have often opted for mixed-method designs (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007; Denscombe, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) (this is not to imply pragmatism prescribes mixed methodology), I chose a qualitative design, specifically comparative case study for this study as it was better suited to the demands for empirical and analytical depth posed by the research question and theoretical framework.

Freedom, nonetheless, did not cause my methodological choices to be permissive and arbitrary (Bryman, 2006). On the contrary, compatibility and coherence were always considered during the planning of my research design, data collection and analysis, and rigour within each element of the methodology was also taken into account. As a result, writings by the methodologists from whom I drew methodological choices (e.g. Morgan, 2007; Creswell, 2013, 2014; Yin, 2018) were very often consulted and juxtaposed. Furthermore, the decisions I took in reaction to the serious problems during fieldwork, as mentioned earlier, were carefully weighed in terms of risks and rewards, although ultimately the outcomes of said decisions, which were positive, depended in part on luck.

## 3.2. Research design: Comparative case study

As stated above, my study followed a qualitative comparative case study design. This choice was made in consideration of the demands for depth and the exploratory nature of this study, and at the same time was motivated by the use of case study in extant SAP research (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2005). My particular design was based on the writings of many prominent scholars in case study (e.g. Stake, 1995; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2018), drawing on both divergent and commensurable ideas and weaving them into a coherent, workable solution to the research question. The key elements of the design included its multi-case orientation, case selection criteria and the necessary data to extract from the cases.

This section will describe my research design, starting with the rationale for choosing the case study methodology and a comparative design (3.2.1). Then, the criteria for case selection will be presented (3.2.2). Towards the end, I will specify which data I sought from the cases (3.2.3).

### 3.2.1. Rationale: Depth, breadth and SAP

Case study as a whole has been noted as one of, if not the most popular qualitative methodology used by management scholars (Piekkari & Welch, 2018), and it holds 'a long, distinguished history' in many social sciences (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Yet, it is highly contested in terms of its nature, purpose, characteristics and what constitutes a case (see, e.g., Yazan, 2015 for a comparison between three methodologists). A brief example is Stake (1995; 2005) versus Eisenhardt (1989): The former does not call case study a methodology but a choice of what to study and emphasises the intrinsic value of every single case; to the scholar, knowledge has to be gained naturalistically or 'through direct experience' with the case (Stake, 2010, p. 220). By comparison, Eisenhardt (1989) calls case study a 'research strategy' (p. 534), which is arguably close in meaning to 'methodology', and focuses on its theory-building capability (the author, however, does not state theory building as the purpose of case study). She promotes multi-case designs where cross-case analyses can help counteract false impressions caused by limited data, thereby improving the robustness of resulting theories. That said, it is not my intent to delve into the methodological debates around case study. In the spirit of pragmatism, I will describe a version of case study that was derived for this study and the reason why it was chosen against another strong contender: ethnography. I will then narrow down on the merits of a multi-case over a single-case design.

In this study, case study is understood as a methodology that investigates empirical instances, incidents or units of a social phenomenon (Yin, 1994; Schwandt & Gates, 2018) in order to generate knowledge about said phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). These instances, incidents or units can be placed under the umbrella term of *case*s. Cases are bounded in a spatial and temporal context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) and therefore unique in their own rights, so the knowledge gained from them (about the phenomenon they reflect) might be transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) but not wholly be applicable to other cases or contexts (see 3.8.2). A 'hallmark' of the case study methodology is its indepth treatment of the case via the use of multiple sources of qualitative data (Creswell, 2013, p. 98) and via the provision of a rich, nuanced report to readers (Yin, 2018). Case study also leaves the possibility for breadth should the researcher choose a multi-case design.

The above characteristics of case study made it a logical choice for my research question and theoretical framework. Case study afforded the depth required by the micro-level focus of the question, the SAP approach and sensemaking theory, without neglecting the context and by extension the structural forces within, which are important in SAP research. However, case study was not the only methodological option considered, but was chosen over a strong contender: ethnography. Ethnography could have provided incredible empirical and analytical depth for this study by requiring me to immerse in the daily organisational routine at the research sites and conduct participant observation on the unfolding of sensemaking praxis among various groups (Cunliffe, 2010, 2015; Creswell, 2013). In the end, however, ethnography was not adopted for two reasons. First, the ethnography methodology presented serious feasibility problems, particularly logistics because my study covered three groups of organisational actors that would very likely have distinct routines and be found in distinct spaces in such a large type of organisation as universities; for example, it would have been hard to imagine deans and students doing similar tasks or being present in the same room, not to mention they might come from different faculties. Thorough participant observation was therefore almost unmanageable. Second, ethnography limited the empirical breadth I wished to achieve, as it was my desire to study at least two universities, which might better reveal the impact of structural forces, especially at the meso (organisational) level, on sensemaking. Although ethnography itself does not exclude a multi-site design (see, e.g. Ciuk, Koning & Kostera, 2018), in my situation such a design would only have been feasible if each site had been studied in turn, consequently not fitting the duration confines of a PhD programme (tying back to the feasibility problem). By contrast, a case study design was much more feasible as it did not require prolonged immersion, and it better allowed for empirical breadth via a multi-case design. Another reason, albeit minor, for my choice of case study was that it had been used commonly and to great success by SAP scholars (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Jarzabkowski, Sillince, & Shaw, 2010; Johnson et al., 2010). All that being said, I did decide to integrate a quasi-ethnographic dimension into my case-based design, in the form of campus visits (see 3.5), to enrich the data.

The aforementioned need for breadth (and with it the examination of meso-level structural influences) was also one reason a comparative, multi-case design was chosen over a single-case design. In addition, the multi-case design would provide a more assured basis for theorising because it would generate more data to work with, and the findings from one case might challenge my impressions of those from another and vice versa, simultaneously making my analysis more critical and grounding the theoretical findings in more varied empirical evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Last but not least, comparative multi-case study, while demanding more time and efforts than single case study, was deemed feasible within the resources I had.

### 3.2.2. Case selection criteria

Theoretical sampling was used for selecting cases (Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). That is, I searched for universities that would illuminate the sensemaking of internationalisation strategies by deans, lecturers and students; my concern was not representation of, for example, a certain higher education system or a class of universities. To this end, there were five criteria, based on insights from the literature review and feasibility concerns:

- First, the universities chosen must have an explicit strategic focus on internationalisation, evident by the inclusion of internationalisation as a component strategy and/or as part of other component strategies and/or as part of the corporate vision and mission. Furthermore, the universities must be active in implementing its internationalisation strategies, evident by regular reports of international activities, either inhouse or by external media, for at least three years counting back from the start of my search for cases (2016). It was deemed that three years were enough to conclude a university was strategically committed to internationalisation. This criterion ensured that, within the chosen universities, there were internationalisation strategies for non-leaders to make sense of.
- Second, no group of non-leaders was left out of internationalisation, so, for example, a university whose lecturers participated in no international activities would be eliminated. This would be evident in the content of the internationalisation strategies and reports of international activities. At the same time, it was extremely preferable that there were strategies involving at least two groups, which would greatly facilitate for intergroup comparisons during analysis (see 3.6). The second criterion ensured that all groups engaged in sensemaking of internationalisation strategies.
- The third and fourth criteria were arguably two sides of the same coin: comparability and data variety. On the one hand, it would be very difficult to compare universities that were vastly different, especially if the differences affected micro-level sensemaking. On the other hand, if said differences were too small, the empirical evidence gathered would not

be varied enough to capitalise on the merits of a multi-case over single-case design. The balancing act between comparability and data variety was a major challenge for the research design. My solution, though crude, was to categorise possible differences according to levels of analysis: macro (e.g. national legislation, culture, education system), meso (e.g. organisational structure, disciplinary focus, financing), micro (e.g. individual background, personality traits[9]), and then choose the level or specific difference I wanted to control for. In the end, I decided to select universities from the same country (i.e. no macro differences) that did not target a specific demographic of students or staff (i.e. limited control over micro differences). Bounding the cases within one country was also motivated by the last case selection criterion: feasibility.

- The number and location of cases should be feasible. Although international comparative research was an attractive prospect for this study and had been called for both in higher education (Forest & Altbach, 2007; Tight et al. 2009) and management (Werner, 2002; Pisani, 2009), it was beyond my resources, particularly time and travel expenses. Therefore, I located the cases in one country. Moreover, because data would be collected with multiple methods and from multiple faculties (see 3.4.3 and 3.5) in order to exploit the potential of each case, it was also decided to keep the sample size at two to maintain a reasonable workload for a lone researcher.

I will come back in Section 3.4 to describe the actual procedure of finding suitable cases, to which the five above criteria were applied, and introduce the two universities chosen. The preceding Section 3.3. will describe and explain why Vietnam was chosen as the country context.

### 3.2.3. Expected empirical output

The role of each case was to provide four main types of data (henceforth coded A, B, C and D) that would help answer my research question:

- *Data A*: the university's internationalisation strategies, as both plans and patterns (see 2.2.1)
- *Data B*: background information about the university, including its history, corporate strategy, organisational structure, and governance
- *Data C*: accounts of non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies, with special focus on those involved as informants (see 3.4.3 for participant recruitment)
- *Data D*: background information about the non-leaders involved as informants (e.g. reasons for applying into the university)

[9] Universities may target a specific demographic of students and/or staff.

The four types of data each had a unique purpose. Data A established my baseline understanding of the university's view of internationalisation and strategic approach to it, thus providing signposts for the collection of Data C (i.e. which strategies participants should be asked about). Data B was also gathered to contextualise the university's internationalisation strategies and non-leaders' sensemaking of those strategies, enabling the examination of structural influences at the meso level on micro-level sensemaking. Data C was the most important among the four as it gave direct insights into non-leaders' sensemaking praxis and how their sensemaking shaped the outcomes of the university's internationalisation strategies. Lastly, Data D enriched Data C by potentially shedding light on their ways of thinking or, in sensemaking terms, schemas.

The data was collected using individual interviews, focus groups, document analysis, campus visits and social media analysis. Section 3.5 and 3.6 will respectively detail the collection and analysis of the data.

### 3.3. Research context: Vietnam and the city of Saigon

The present study was conducted in my home country of Vietnam, which was chosen for three reasons. First, internationalisation has actually played a major role in the country's education for 2000 years (Tran, Marginson, & Nguyen, 2014). In ancient times, China invaded Vietnam and imposed their language and culture, most notably Confucianism, in an attempt to assimilate the latter. It also allowed some Vietnamese scholars to take part in examinations in China; this was the earliest form of student mobility that Vietnam had. French colonists also brought their language and culture and facilitated student mobility from Vietnam to France. Moreover, they built what could be considered the first international university in the country: *Université Indochinoise* in 1906 in Hanoi (later renamed to *Vietnam National University*), which recruited students from all French colonies in Southeast Asia. During the Vietnam War, Vietnamese higher education had two distinct areas of internationalisation. Academics in the socialist North participated in exchanges with the Soviets, while students in the American-backed South received scholarships to go to the US. Internationalisation has been revitalised in modern Vietnam. On the one hand, foreign initiatives have taken various forms, ranging from scholarships to study abroad (e.g. Chevening scholarship from the British government) to branch campuses (e.g. RMIT University from Australia). On the other hand, the country's own universities are trying to internationalise themselves by, for example, establishing joint programmes (e.g. http://chuyentiep.khoaquocte.vn/), teaching in English (e.g. https://admission.tdtu.edu.vn/en), joining international university networks (e.g. http://www.aunsec.org/aunmemberuniversities.php). In the last two years alone, a few high-profile events on higher education internationalisation were organised across the country. These included

- a conference on building excellence in higher education involving the Australian Embassy, held in January 2019 (https://vnu.edu.vn/ttsk/?C1654/N24477/day-manh-quoc-te-hoa-giao-duc,-huong-den-xay-dung-dai-hoc-uu-tu.htm)
- a symposium on rankings in Times Higher Education, co-organised by major public universities in Southern Vietnam in June 2019 (personal communication, the event was closed and not publicised)
- most notably, a conference on reforming the Higher Education Law, held by the Parliament in August 2018. Internationalisation was an area of interest in the new law. (https://tapchigiaoduc.moet.gov.vn/vi/news/Tin-tuc-su-kien/hoi-thao-giao-duc-2018-giao-duc-dai-hoc-chuan-hoa-va-hoi-nhap-quoc-te-350.html)

Considering all of this, Vietnam offers a useful context from which to study higher education internationalisation.

Second, Vietnam is located in Southeast Asia, an under-researched region for higher education that has more recently captured attention from both scholars and practitioners (Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2013; University of Oxford, 2015). Furthermore, research into higher education internationalisation in Vietnam is scarce and narrow, most being policy and situation analyses, and usually takes the form of desk studies (see, e.g., Welch, 2009; Tran, 2014).

Third, the fact that I am a Vietnamese could be of advantage during data collection, due to shared language and cultural understanding with my participants.

The research context was further narrowed down to the city of Saigon. Saigon was the city I was most familiar with in Vietnam, making travelling to and between my target universities easy. More important, I had a considerable personal network consisting of lecturers and academic managers in five large universities in the city, high school teachers and my own students[10], all of whom could provide me with indepth knowledge about local universities and their internationalisation so that I could make a more well-founded case selection. If they worked at a university that I selected, they would be valuable key informants and may facilitate or grant me access. Lastly, Saigon was and is the most developed city in Vietnam economically and host to many international activities in education. As a result, universities in Saigon have more resources and opportunities for internationalisation.

[10] I had been an English teacher in Saigon prior to my PhD.

## 3.4. The cases and participants

With my research design and context established, the rest of this chapter will describe how my comparative design was realised in the Vietnamese context with the selection of cases and participants, collection and analysis of data and the address of major quality issues, including ethics and trustworthiness.

This section begins by reporting the procedure with which two universities in Saigon were chosen as cases and accessed (3.4.1). I will then recapture the complications I had with each university before and after access (3.4.2), which had serious implications for participant recruitment and data collection. Next, I will outline the selection criteria for participants (3.4.3) and describe how the planned procedure for recruitment had to be significantly changed (3.4.4).

### 3.4.1. Case selection procedure and access request

Case selection began in August 2016 and was conducted in two stages. In the initial stage, I surveyed the websites and social media of the 53 universities in Saigon (https://tuyensinhso.vn/khu-vuc/dh-hv-khu-vuc-tphcm-c11806.html) to find whether they had internationalisation strategies or at least a strategic statement about internationalisation. Particular attention was paid to phrases such as *tam nhin quoc te* (international vision), *chien luoc quoc te hoa* (internationalisation strategy) or *hoat dong quoc te* (international activities). These universities were wholly Vietnamese and not foreign-owned (e.g. RMIT Saigon) or foreign-invested (e.g. Vietnam-Germany University) in order to maintain comparability. Information from the institutions was supplemented with news report about their international activities, if available. My initial search resulted in 14 qualifying universities, of which 10 were public and the others were private.

In the later stage, I refined my search by examining the websites of these 14 universities more closely, this time perusing all available information on their teaching, research and extra-curricular for signs of internationalisation. I also contacted my network of highschool teachers, lecturers and academic managers to ask for their opinion on these HEIs and their internationalisation. Another source of opinion was my former students, some of whom were doing their undergraduate studies and presumably had looked up information about universities in Saigon when they were in the last year of highschool. At the end of this stage, I managed to narrow down to six public and three private universities. I then re-read all the information gathered about them and, for each sector, chose the one that I felt was most active in internationalisation. The final two universities became my cases.

To protect their identity, the universities are henceforth called *Blue* (private) and *Red* (public). *Blue* was possibly the most reputable private university in Saigon and regarded by most in my personal network as 'significantly better' than other private universities (personal communication), and indeed it often appeared on the media for being progressive and innovative in teaching (e.g. offering modules in global citizenship, substantial placement). The university was founded in the 1990s as a vocational school for clerical work and digital media, then became a college in early to mid 2000s before attaining its university status in late 2000s, and throughout its history *Blue* had been non-profit. All the information collected about *Blue* showed a clear international outlook. It emphasised foreign language learning beyond English, had a joint venture with a French business school in Saigon that specialised in hospitality, offered joint programmes, offered exchange and internship opportunities outside Vietnam. *Blue's* joint programmes deserve special mention because they were developed from the ground up with a foreign partner and highly customised to be delivered almost wholly in Vietnam. This stood in contrast with the *2:2* or *3:1* joint arrangements more commonly found in other Vietnamese universities[11] where students would undertake, say, the first 2 years at home with a local curriculum, then transferred abroad for the latter 2 years to finish their degree, studying the curriculum of the university they transferred to.

*Red* was a young public university established in the early 2000s. It had quickly gained in status to become one of the most attractive destinations, whether public or private, for students in Saigon and Southern Vietnam. This increasing appeal was reflected in the steady rise in entry requirements over the years. The university prided itself on being the first Vietnamese university to teach in English, its modern campus and an academic staff body who completed their doctorate in the West (Anglo-American and European countries). Like *Blue*, *Red* also showed a clear international outlook, including use of English as the medium of instruction, curricula and textbooks adapted from the West, recruitment of Vietnamese doctoral graduates from the West, research publication on Web of Science index, joint and exchange programmes. One of my former students, who graduated from an elite highschool in Saigon, applied to *Red* because of its 'international feel and quality' (personal communication).

[11] See, for example (please use Chrome browser, once on the page, right click anywhere on the page and choose translate into English)
https://oisp.hcmut.edu.vn/chuong-trinh-dao-tao/chuong-trinh-lien-ket-quoc-te/ky-thuat-dien-dien-tu-lien-ket-quoc-te.html
http://chuyentiep.khoaquocte.vn/
http://www.saigontech.edu.vn/chuong-trinh-hoc-una-du-hoc-my-2-plus-2.html

A more detailed profile of *Blue* and *Red*, including their history, structure, corporate strategy and internationalisation strategies, can be found in Chapter 4 and 5, where their case studies are respectively presented.

I then wrote formal letters of interest to the Vice-Chancellors of *Blue* and *Red*, which in Vietnam is deemed more socially acceptable than emailing. In the letters, I introduced myself and expressed my wish to study their universities, the international prospects of which were highlighted. This was followed by an outline of my research aims and data collection methods; I kept all description of my study very brief and formatted into bullet points in order not to waste the Vice-Chancellors' time. Also included was a dedicated paragraph on the practical benefits the study might bring to their organisations, and I promised to give them a debriefing on the practical implications of the findings once fieldwork was over. It was made clear, however, that the identity of the participants had to be kept anonymous, and the identity of the university would also be anonymised in the thesis and any ensuing publications unless the Vice-Chancellors preferred otherwise (which they did not). At the end of the latter, I reasserted my wish to study *Blue* and *Red* and politely asked for an audience with the Vice-Chancellors.

The letters of interest were sent to *Blue* and *Red* in mid-September and mid-October, respectively. The one-month gap was to reduce the likelihood of being called and invited on campus at the same time.

Notwithstanding, I soon discovered that securing access to *Blue* and *Red* was much more difficult than I had anticipated.

### 3.4.2. Complications with access

There were serious complications with access to both *Blue* and *Red*, dramatically altering participant recruitment and data collection. To start with, my letter of interest to *Blue* was responded within one month, and two weeks later in November 2016 I was granted an audience with the Vice-Chancellor, who welcomed my research and granted me access. By chance, there was a forthcoming conference on higher education and globalisation the same month, to which she invited me to present. She also informed me of a weekly series of workshops called *Blue Research Seminar*, where lecturers from many faculties came to learn about research methodology, and recommended that I present there at least once to socialise with lecturers. I took advantage of both opportunities and managed to establish contact with three lecturers, who turned out to be invaluable later on (see 3.4.4). Complications arose at the end of November, when I was informed by the Vice-Chancellor

that my participant recruitment and data collection should be postponed due to an ownership conflict among the board of directors. In brief, there were two opposing groups in the board who vied for ownership of the university: One side, led by the Vice-Chancellor, wanted to keep the university non-profit while the other, led by a private investor, wanted to turn it into for-profit. The secretary to the Vice-Chancellor explained to me that a private, non-profit university was not legally allowed to pay dividends as it saw fit but had to adhere to the government bond rate, which was very low and deemed unacceptable by a number of board members. This legislation was only introduced in 2014 and in response said members called to transform *Blue* into for-profit so that high dividends could be paid, leading a split in the board of directors. Neither side possessed a share majority to force a decision, and after three years of impasse internal negotiations had broken down, which triggered the for-profit board members to initiate a takeover. From November 2016 to February 2017, both sides of the board engaged in legal actions, with the city authorities also embroiled in the dispute. The internal situation quickly became chaotic with student protests, lecturer resignations and constant top management-faculty meetings. In February 2017 the for-profit side won and took ownership of *Blue*, and the first thing they did, apart from making *Blue* for-profit, was to dismiss not only top management but also middle management, who were supportive of the Vice-Chancellor and her side of the board. Dissenting, outspoken lecturers were also made redundant. A new top management team were quickly recruited and installed.

When informed about the ownership conflict back in November 2016, I had to consider the risk of losing access and thus the necessity of finding another case. In the end, however, there were three reasons that I decided not to drop *Blue* and waited until the legal actions were over to push on with my research. First and most importantly, the Vice-Chancellor said she would sit for an interview and assist with my research regardless of court outcomes. She even encouraged me to persevere as she herself strongly believed that *Blue* would be a good case for Vietnamese higher education. As shall be seen in 3.4.4, the Vice-Chancellor did uphold her words. Secondly, gaining access to another university might have very well taken the same amount of time as waiting out the ownership conflict. During my case selection (see the last section), a senior academic manager of a major public university, whom I knew personally, warned me that a request like mine could take up to two or three months for a response or be ignored completely. His warning did happen with *Red*, in that I had to wait until January 2017 to receive a response to my letter (I will come back to this very shortly); the complications with *Red* partly motivated me not to abandon *Blue*. The third and final reason was that, from my audience with the Vice-Chancellor, it was apparent *Blue* had a clear conceptualisation of internationalisation and was serious in pursuing its internationalisation strategies; its case, therefore, would likely provide rich data for my study. Nevertheless, fieldwork at *Blue* was pushed back nearly five months until March 2017 and became an immense challenge (see 3.4.3 and 3.5).

Complications with access were also encountered with *Red*, specifically with regards to communication and the university's operational timing. After waiting a month with no response to my letter of interest, I called the university in mid-November 2016 to enquire if they had received it and was told to send the letter again to the *External Relations Office*. I suspected that going through all the bureaucracy would take a lot of time, and therefore in addition to sending another letter to *External Relations* as instructed, I leveraged all my personal connections and tried my best to find someone who could help me contact a middle or senior manager at *Red*. One month's worth of networking led me to a quick meeting with a Pro-Vice Chancellor in a coffee shop in Saigon in December 2016, who gave me the Vice-Chancellor's email; unfortunately, the Pro-Vice Chancellor did not have the authority to grant me access. Before emailing the Vice-Chancellor, I contacted the university again to see if my letter was processed and it was about to be, so I refrained from doing so. Two weeks later in mid-January 2017 I received a call from *External Relations* that I needed to wait until after the upcoming traditional Vietnamese New Year, which was in February, to have an audience with the Vice-Chancellor. In late February I finally met the Vice-Chancellor to explain my research and was granted access, and the head of *External Relations* was delegated as my point of contact; I was required to sign a non-disclosure agreement (to be elaborated shortly). The timing, however, was extremely inopportune. At that time the university was preparing for a two-month series of student recruitment activities, including three open days, and this involved a lot of academic staff and students. Therefore, the head of *External Relations* recommended I should postpone my fieldwork in order not to bother anyone until mid to late April. To make matters worse, by late April the university was entering the second semester exam, followed by summer vacation. Although I managed to interview the head of *External Relations* and the Pro-Vice Chancellor in internationalisation in April 2017 (see 3.5 for the full data collection procedure), it was not until mid to late May that the rest of my fieldwork started.

As said above, I was required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. The agreement was rather simple, containing only three points:

- The identity of Red should be kept anonymous in my publications.
- I would not provide any data or information about Red to a third party.
- No visual data would be used in my publications.

It can be seen that the agreement did not prevent the publication of my research. In fact, the first two points were already part of my ethical measures (see 3.7), and the third point could easily be met.

In brief, access into *Red* took much longer than I had anticipated and this was compounded by the university's operational timing, consequently delaying my fieldwork. In fact, fieldwork

started approximately four months later than I anticipated. That said, the head of *External Relations* was greatly helpful in setting up my interview with her and the Pro-Vice Chancellor in internationalisation in April 2017, not to mention she also referred me to the deans of the faculties I wanted to investigate.

In the very beginning in September 2016, I did consider sending letters of interest to other universities besides *Blue* and *Red* in case there were complications with them. However, that would have posed a risk for my personal reputation. Supposing I had been granted an audience with three Vice-Chancellors or more, I would have had to withdraw my request for access with at least one of them during our meeting (withdrawing after being granted access would have been worse). This could have permanently damaged my relations with them and thus prevented me from, for example, doing research into their universities in the future. Moreover, I could not have anticipated the serious complications with *Blue* and *Red*. Up until now, I have not been able to devise any solutions to circumvent such complications.

### 3.4.3. Participant selection criteria

For each case, I intended to interview a top manager, especially the one that granted me access, a high-ranking officer in charge of internationalisation (e.g. head of international relations), and most importantly deans, lecturers and students, whose accounts of their own sensemaking were the core type of data (refer back to 3.2.3). While the identification of said top manager and officer in internationalisation was rather straightforward, the recruitment of deans, lecturers and students, who were much more numerous, required a set of criteria. Once again theoretical sampling was used to choose the deans, lecturers and students to be interviewed about their sensemaking of internationalisation strategies. The composition of the non-leaders involved needed not to be representative of *Blue* or *Red* or any groups them, but rather it had to enhance data richness and variety. This guiding principle helped to narrow down the participant pool as follows:

- First, deans, lecturers and students would be recruited from faculties and departments[12] that were active in internationalisation, identified by the aforementioned top manager and officer in internationalisation. The faculties and departments should differ in disciplinary focus in order to avoid potential disciplinary bias in terms of internationalisation. For example, business schools might be more receptive to international accreditations and rankings (see Gioia & Corley, 2002; Luca & Smith, 2015) than a history department. Nonetheless, it would have been interesting to see how non-leaders in passive faculties and departments made sense of internationalisation strategies, but the inclusion of such faculties and departments would have increased my

[12] A faculty represents a discipline (e.g. Faculty of Sciences) and contains smaller departments (e.g. Department of Physics), each representing an area of that discipline.

work load significantly as it demanded more data and complicated analysis (with the comparison between active and passive faculties and departments).

- Second, a minimum of two years working/studying full-time was required of the participants to ensure their familiarity with the university and increase the likelihood of them having experienced internationalisation. This eliminated all part-time students and lecturers working on a fixed-term or indefinite contractual basis. In addition, recruitment preference would be given to those who had frequently engaged in international activities and were higher in seniority.
- Third, only undergraduate students were recruited. This criterion was added after my entry interviews with the top management of both *Blue* and *Red* (see 3.5 for the full data collection procedure), who recommended recruiting only undergraduates. The reason was that at both universities, the undergraduate bodies accounted for more than 90% of the student population, making finding the appropriate postgraduates difficult. Furthermore, most of *Blue* and *Red's* international activities were aimed at undergraduates.
- Fourth, the number of faculties/departments and of lecturers and students within each had to be feasible (the number of deans was understandably always one). It was decided that two faculties per university and ten lecturers, ten students per faculty was desirable. However, as shall be seen very shortly below, the number of participants recruited was considerably smaller due to the complications with access described in the previous section.

### 3.4.4. Participant recruitment procedure

The procedure for recruiting participants at *Blue* and *Red* was dramatically changed by complications with access. Initially, a systematic, snowball procedure was planned. At each university, I would invite a top manager, especially the one that granted me access, and a high-ranking officer in charge of internationalisation to each participate in an entry interview (again see 3.5). During the interviews, I would ask them to identify two faculties that were active in internationalisation and provide me with the contact details of the deans so that I can could contact them, negotiate access into their faculties and recruit them for interview. Upon granted faculty access, I would recruit the rest of the participants by, with permission, putting up recruitment notices in shared spaces, mainly staffrooms, classrooms and stairways. Respondents to the recruitment notices would be asked to point me towards other potential participants. In addition, I would request the deans for permission to have the contact details of lecturers and to send out invitation emails to them; afterwards, I would ask the lecturers to refer me to student representatives in their classes and then ask those to relay my invitation to their friends. The ultimate goal was to find, as stated previously, ten lecturers and ten students from each faculty who qualified for the two-year, full-time threshold and preferably were high in seniority and had frequently engaged in international activities.

The actual recruitment that I carried out was less systematic, more opportunistic and unique to each case. At *Blue*, although the Vice-Chancellor had agreed to sit for an interview and assist me in contacting deans regardless of the court outcomes, I decided to wait until the transition from the old board and top management team to the new one was completed before contacting her again in March 2017. This was to make sure that I would not be bothering her and that she had time to talk to me. With great appreciation to the Vice Chancellor, I was granted an interview. However, no entry interview was conducted with the officer in charge of internationalisation as he was unreachable. The Vice-Chancellor then recommended that I contact all *Blue* deans and not just those of the faculties active in internationalisation, in case the latter were unreachable after their dismissal or refused to participate. Fortunately, by late April I had managed to arrange a meeting with and recruit the deans of two, according to the Vice-Chancellor, internationalisation-active faculties: *Economics and Commerce*, and *Language and Culture*. The next, more difficult step was to recruit lecturers and students, which the deans could not help with because they had been dismissed. Neither was it any longer feasible (or advisable) to place recruitment notices around campus. My solution was to call the few lecturers that I had known from the conferences and seminars I had luckily attended (refer back to 3.4.2) and invite them out for coffee[13]. I would present my research and ask them to refer me to their colleagues and students; were they themselves to qualify my criteria, I also invited them to participate. One lecturer from *Language and Culture*, in particular, was immensely helpful in that she invited me to a dissertation defense of final-year students in her faculty, where I was able to recruit three students. I met and recruited all the participants online via *Facebook* or email, or face-to-face on campus or at a coffee shop. A lot of efforts were also invested into building rapport with the lecturers and demonstrating to them that I was not a spy for the new board (see also 3.7 for ethics). Overall, participant recruitment at *Blue* was very slow, and three lecturers refused to participate for fear that their interview response might be leaked to the new board against their interests. After two months of recruitment, in June I was able to find five lecturers and five students from *Economics and Commerce*, and four lecturers and five students from *Language and Culture*. The details of all participants from *Blue* and *Red* are shown in Table 6 below; the number after gender signify the number of years working/studying full-time by the time of data collection.

*Table 6*. Participant details

| ***Blue*** | ***Red*** |
|---|---|
| Vice-Chancellor: female, 25 | Pro-Vice Chancellor in internationalisation: male, 6<br>Head of *External Relations*: female, 6 |
| ***Economics and Commerce*** | ***Business School*** |

[13] It is a common social practice in Vietnam to do business over coffee.

| | |
|---|---|
| Dean: male, 4<br>Lecturer 1: female, over 10<br>Lecturer 2: female, 3<br>Lecturer 3: female, 4<br>Lecturer 4: male, 2<br>Lecturer 5: male, 3<br>Student 1: female, 4<br>Student 2: female, 4<br>Student 3: female, 4<br>Student 4: female, 4<br>Student 5: male, 3<br><br>***Language and Culture***<br>Dean: male, 5<br>Lecturer 1: female, 6<br>Lecturer 2: female, 3<br>Lecturer 3: male, 4<br>Lecturer 4: male, 5<br>Student 1: female, 3<br>Student 2: female, 3<br>Student 3: female, 3<br>Student 4: male, 3<br>Student 5: male, 2 | Deputy dean: male, 4<br>Lecturer 1: male, 4<br>Lecturer 2: male, 8<br>Lecturer 3: male, 5<br>Lecturer 4: female, 3<br>Student 1: female, 3<br>Student 2: female, 3<br>Student 3: female, 3<br>Student 4: male, 4<br>Student 5: male, 4<br><br>***Computer Science***<br>Dean: male, 3<br>Lecturer 1: female, 6<br>Lecturer 2: male, 3<br>Lecturer 3: male, 2<br>Lecturer 4: male, 3<br>Student 1: female, 3<br>Student 2: male, 3<br>Student 3: male, 3<br>Student 4: male, 3<br><br>***Industrial Engineering***<br>Student 1: male, 3<br>Student 2: male, 4 |
| Note: 4 for students means that they were either close to graduation or had recently graduated | |

At *Red*, I had to wait until all the student recruitment activities had subsided to conduct the entry interview in April 2017, one with the Pro-Vice Chancellor of internationalisation and another with the head of External Relations, who identified *Business School* and *Computer Science* as the two faculties active in internationalisation. The head of External Relations then referred me to the deputy dean of *Business School* (the dean was unavailable for participation) and dean of *Computer Science*, both of whom agreed to participate and helped me contact the lecturers of their respective faculties. However, I had to wait until after the semester exam in May to begin recruitment and was not allowed to place recruitment notices around campus. By this time the university had entered summer vacation, but because I could not wait until the new academic year due to the timing of my doctoral programme, recruitment had to commence despite the sparsely populated summer campus. Most lecturers still worked during the summer, but they were not present on campus as frequently as during term time and responded to my invitation emails very slowly. That said, a few were willing to participate. Student recruitment, however, was a much greater concern because most had left on vacation. I decided against asking for references from deans or lecturers, which I felt would bother them too much. Instead, I would go on campus and conduct recruitment myself by meeting students in hallways and other shared spaces. The

head of *External Relations* also suggested I attend a pre-departure meeting for students of joint programmes between *Red* and a British university, who were preparing to transfer to the UK for the second-half of their degree; it was here that I managed to recruit two students. In addition, I discovered that one of my former students happened to be studying at *Red*; although he was from neither *Business School* nor *Computer Science*, he volunteered to participate and referred a friend of his. I kept contact with the recruited students via *Facebook* and invited them for a drink either on campus or in central Saigon to build rapport. By July, I had recruited four lecturers and five students from *Business School*, four lecturers and four students from *Computer Science*, and two students from *Industrial Engineering*.

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, which was sought in two stages (see 3.7 for other ethical measures). During my first contact with any prospective participants, I introduced myself (introduction was not necessary with my former student) and the purpose for contacting them, which was to invite them for an interview. I also briefly described my research and assured them that, were they to participate, their identity and response would be kept anonymous. Finally, I emphasised that they were free to enquire about any issues and that if they no longer wanted to be in the study, they could opt out at any time without repercussion. The purpose of this stage was to ensure prospective participants were informed of their role and rights, and those who were willing to participate were then asked for their contact details (email, facebook or mobile phone), with which I could build rapport and arrange interviews later. I did not present the consent form (Appendix A) this early on as it was deemed too forward and pushing.

Afterwards, I sent the participants a thank you message and asked to arrange our interviews. I also tried to engage in small chats with students and a few young lecturers to build rapport. More importantly, it was during this stage that I explained to the participants I needed them to sign a consent form as part of the ethical requirements of my PhD and more generally of doing research in the UK. The form repeated what I had informed them earlier about their role as interviewee and my guarantee of their anonymity and right to withdraw. Efforts were made to emphasise that signing the form would not place them under any obligations or risks. The form was then sent digitally to each participant for perusal, and he/she was given the option to sign it digitally then or physically when we later met for interview. Throughout this stage, I made a point of writing messages and not calling them on the phone or facebook[14], which I felt would have been intrusive.

[14] Facebook enables users to call each other. This service is similar to other voice over internet ones like Skype or Apple's FaceTime.

The consent form, nonetheless, was not signed by all participants. While most participants did, either digitally or physically, there were a few who refused to sign the form:

- Lecturer 5 and Student 5[15] in *Economics and Commerce* at *Blue*
- Student 5 in *Language and Culture* at *Blue*
- Lecturer 4 in *Business School* at *Red*
- The dean and Lecturer 4 in *Computer Science* at *Red*

None of the above participants withdrew their agreement to be interviewed but said they were uncomfortable signing the consent form; one Red lecturer, in particular, found signing 'too formal and heavy'. All that being said, when I wrote to them to arrange an interview (via email, facebook or mobile phone), they did respond in writing with their consent. Therefore, informed consent was in fact provided by the participants, despite their subsequent unwillingness to sign the consent form. Two exceptions, however, were Lecturer 5 in *Economics and Commerce* at *Blue* and Lecturer 4 in *Computer Science* at *Red*. I arranged an interview with them via text message, to which they responded with a phone call and gave their consent. Because the calls were not recorded, there was no evidence of their consent. Even though I still interviewed all the participants who had not signed the form to show my sincerity and seriousness about their participation, any data gained from them was not used in this study.

It was interesting to observe that the consent form, which I had learned was a normal component of research, caused discomfort in some of my participants. While luckily none of them decided to withdraw, their refusal to sign the form drew my attention to the cultural dimension of participant recruitment and informed consent. In retrospect, their refusal was explicable from a cultural perspective, at least from my own experience as a Vietnamese. First, signing papers was usually confined to the context of work, doing business or dealing with the authorities (e.g. registering one's marriage); therefore, signing the consent form might have indeed been 'too formal and heavy' as said by one Red lecturer. Second, social science research in Vietnam was not as rigourous in terms of ethical procedures as that in the UK. I used to be involved as a participant in two research projects in Vietnam and was not asked to sign anything; moreover, I myself conducted one small project for my undergraduate degree, for which I was not required to present my participants with a consent form. Yet another potential reason, though perhaps not specific to the Vietnamese context, was that some participants might have been anxious about their response being leaked to superiors against their interests. Regardless of reason, I respected the wish of those who did not want to sign the consent form, neither nudging them to sign nor eliciting an explanation from them, which would have been unethical.

[15] Participants who did not sign the consent form were always given the last-number codes for easy retrieval.

## 3.5. Data collection

Data collection was conducted using individual interview, focus group, document analysis, campus visit and social media analysis. The combination of multiple methods satisfied the demands for depth of my research question, theoretical framework and the case-based design (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, it allowed for data triangulation between methods (Denzin, 1989), which helped counteract potential bias from any single methods. Ultimately, the combination was expected to produce nuanced accounts of sensemaking praxis that a lone method could not, because data from one method could contextualise, substantiate or problematise that from another. Such accounts then provided a robust basis for theorisation.

The five methods were woven into a three-stage data collection procedure that was expected to span 9 months. Due to complications with access, the total duration was 12 months, and the procedures at both *Blue* and *Red* had to be adapted with some compromises, but overall they were similar to what I had planned.

This section describes my three-stage data collection procedures at *Blue* and *Red* and locates the data collection methods within each stage. Furthermore, I will explain the role of each method in contributing to the four types of data necessary to answer the research question (refer back to 3.2.3):

- *Data A*: the university's internationalisation strategies, as both plans and patterns
- *Data B*: background information about the university, including its history, corporate strategy, organisational structure, and governance
- *Data C*: accounts of non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies, with special focus on those involved as informants
- *Data D*: background information about the non-leaders involved as informants (e.g. reasons for applying into the university)

The section begins with timelines of data collection at *Blue* and *Red* (3.5.1) in order to provide a historical overview of the three stages, the methods used and the data collected. The rest of this section, from 3.5.2 to 3.5.8, will focus on each stage and/or method. Finally, Section 3.5.9 will quantitatively account for the amount of data gathered.

### 3.5.1. Historical overview of data collection

My initial plan was to divide data collection at *Blue* and *Red* into three main stages. Stage 1 was to establish a background understanding of the case, which then informed interviews in Stage 2, and to identify and provide contact of the faculties to focus on. This stage involved

analysis of strategic documents followed by two entry interviews, one with a top manager and the other with a high-ranking officer in charge of internationalisation (e.g. head of international relations).

Stage 2 began once faculty access had been granted and was the central stage of data collection. Its purpose was to investigate the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of deans, lecturers and students; participant recruitment was also done in Stage 2. This stage was characterised by individual interviews with deans and then focus groups with lecturers and students – more specifically, in each faculty there would be two focus groups, one for lecturers and the other for students, so the total number of focus groups per case was four. Interview was chosen to investigate sensemaking because it allowed me to 'explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others' (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3), and the method itself has often been drawn upon in sensemaking research (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Rouleau, 2005; Sonenshein, 2010; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

The final stage was member-checking (Creswell, 2013), where I followed up with all participants in Stage 2 (deans, lecturers, students) so that they could feedback on the data and my impressions of what they had said.

Throughout my fieldwork, campus visits would be conducted whenever there was a faculty-wide international activity in the faculties I focused on; in addition, there would be one campus visit per case in the beginning (Stage 1) to familiarise myself with the layout and facilities of the campus. Campus visits would enrich my understanding of *Blue* and *Red* and supply materials for participants to comment on during the interviews. All interviews were to be on campus unless requested otherwise by the participants.

Table 7 (next page) illustrates the intended timeline for data collection and the actual procedure that I undertook at *Blue* and *Red*. Target time for access is also included to put data collection into perspective.

*Table 7*. Research timeline

| | **Intended** | ***Blue*** | ***Red*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Access** | November or December 2016 | November 2016 | February 2017 |
| **Fieldwork start** | Right after access | March 2017 | May 2017 |
| **Stage 1** background information of the case | **December 2016 to January 2017**<br>• analysis of strategic documents<br>• entry interviews with a top manager and an officer in internationalisation | **March 2017**<br>• entry interview with the Vice-Chancellor at her home<br>• strategic documents were obtained later from an archival officer, who was also dismissed after the ownership dispute. | **April 2017**<br>• strategic documents were provided by the Head of External Relations<br>• entry interview with the Pro-Vice Chancellor in internationalisation and the head of *External Relations* |
| **Vietnamese traditional Lunar New Year** | | | |
| **Stage 2** interview on non-leaders' sensemaking | **March to May 2017**<br>• individual interviews with deans<br>• participant recruitment<br>• one focus group per faculty for all lecturers of said faculty<br>• one focus group per faculty for all students of said faculty | **April 2017**<br>interviews with deans of *Economics and Commerce* and *Language and Culture* at their homes<br>**April to June 2017**<br>participant recruitment<br>**June to August 2017**<br>• one focus group with two lecturers from *Economics and Commerce* (out of five)<br>• individual interviews with all other lecturers<br>• one focus group with four students from *Economics and Commerce* (out of five)<br>• one focus group with two students from *Language and Culture* (out of five)<br>• individual interviews with all other students | **May 2017**<br>interviews with deans of *Business School* and *Computer Science*<br>**May to July 2017**<br>participant recruitment<br>**July to September 2017**<br>• one focus group with all four lecturers from *Business School*<br>• individual interviews with all other lecturers<br>• one focus group with four students from *Business School* (out of five)<br>• one focus group with all four students from *Computer Science*<br>• individual interviews with all other students |
| **Stage 3** member-checking | **June to August 2017**<br>individual follow-up with all participants | **September to October 2017**<br>member-checking was only done with<br>• the two deans<br>• two lecturers from *Economics and Commerce*<br>• one lecturers from *Language and Culture*<br>• four students from *Economics and Commerce* | **October to November 2017**<br>member-checking was only done with<br>• dean of *Computer Science*<br>• two lecturers from *Business School*<br>• one lecturers from *Computer Science*<br>• two students from *Business School* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | • two students from *Language and Culture*<br>Other participants either were unreachable or refused to provide follow-up | • two students from *Computer Science*<br>• one student from *Industrial Engineering*<br>Other participants either were unreachable or refused to provide follow-up |
| **Campus visits** | • One visit in the beginning for familiarisation with the campus<br>• Conducted whenever there was a faculty-wide international activity | **November 2016**<br>• presentation at a conference on higher education and globalisation<br>• presentation at a training workshop on research methodology<br>**December 2016**<br>• a tour around campus<br>• attendance at strategic meetings between top management and the faculties<br><br>No longer possible after the instalment of the new top management | **March 2017**<br>• attendance at an open day<br>• a tour around campus<br>**April 2017**<br>attendance at pre-departure meeting for students of joint programmes between *Red* and a British university<br><br>No events to attend during the summer |
| **Social media** | unplanned | Used throughout to recruit participants and then build and maintain rapport with them. Part of the data was gathered from online conversations.<br><br>Social media also provided supplementary data on students' sensemaking. | Used throughout to recruit participants and then build and maintain rapport with them. Part of the data was gathered from online conversations.<br><br>Social media also provided key data on students' sensemaking. |

Despite serious setbacks with access, data collection at both *Blue* and *Red* was mostly executed as intended, with a few necessary adjustments. First, data collection started a few months late at both universities. Second, the order of methods in Stage 1 was switched for *Blue* (to be elaborated in 3.5.2 below). Third, many interviews with participants from *Blue* were held off campus (in some cases in personal spaces) because they were either dismissed from the university or wished not to be seen talking at lengths to a stranger during the power transition from the old to the new board and top management. Fourth, campus visits were limited both at *Blue*, due to the departure of my gatekeeper (the Vice-Chancellor), and at *Red*, due to the lack of any activities during the summer. One issue that was not strictly related to the complications with access was the inability to involve all lecturers or students of a faculty into a focus group, and therefore individual interviews had to be held in supplementation. However, this had been anticipated during planning.

Apart from adjustments, there was an addition to my data collection methods: social media. Initially social media was only used to recruit and maintain rapport with participants, but both *Blue* and *Red* students suggested that I pay more attention to the various social media communities created and run by students at the two universities, because what happened in the physical world would then be discussed in the digital world. As shall be seen in Chapter 5 (the case study of *Red*), social media played a significant role not only as a data collection method but as a finding itself.

With all that said, I will now describe each stage-method in the data collection procedure, starting with document analysis in Stage 1.

### 3.5.2. Stage 1: Document analysis

In the very beginning, the corporate strategy and, if available separate, the internationalisation component strategy would be collected and analysed to establish an institutional profile of *Blue* and *Red* (Data B) and more importantly to examine their internationalisation strategies (Data A). The information gained from the corporate strategy would partly inform my entry interview (3.5.3).

I was provided with *Red's* corporate strategy for the 2011-2015 strategic period by the head of *External Relations* within two weeks from my audience with the Vice-Chancellor. The strategy was quite substantial, being over 100 pages long, and included the vision and mission statement, SWOT analysis, all component strategies (11 in total). The coporate strategy was accompanied by a comprehensive action plan to implement the component

strategies with key performance indicators (KPIs) for monitoring and evaluation. The internationalisation strategies were integrated into said 11 component strategies.

By contrast, I did not receive *Blue's* corporate strategy until after the entry interview with the Vice-Chancellor. This was because the strategy, along with many important documents, was (secretly) kept by an archival officer who was dismissed when the new board and top management came to power. After the entry interview, the Vice-Chancellor referred to this person, who then gave me the strategy. *Blue's* corporate strategy, made for 2011 to 2020, was much shorter than *Red's* at only half the length, but the structure was largely similar with the vision and mission statement, SWOT analysis, all component strategies (five in total) and KPIs. The internationalisation strategies were integrated into the five component strategies.

Apart from the corporate strategy, I wanted to access annual reports, which might shed lights into the degree of success of each internationalisation strategy. This would allow me to focus on certain strategies during subsequently interviews. However, I was denied access to annual reports at *Red*, and while the archival officer at *Blue* sent me a five-year report (2011-2015), it was not detailed enough with regards to internationalisation strategies.

### 3.5.3. Stage 1: Entry interview

Interviews would then be individually held for a top manager and an internationalisation officer of *Blue* and *Red*. These interviews were labelled *entry interviews* to distinguish them from other interviews later on. The purpose of entry interview was threefold:

- First, it identified the universities' internationalisation strategies (Data A), but as emergent patterns of actions rather than deliberate plans (see 2.2.1 for my working understanding of strategy). Thus, my question for the interviewee would be: 'What does the university do to internationalise?' instead of, for example 'Could your please outline your internationalisation strategies?' (see Appendix B for all interview questions). In addition, I asked for elaboration of any internationalisation strategies that I found ambiguous in the corporate strategy.
- Second, I sought to gain preliminary insights into the sensemaking of deans, lecturers and students when it comes to internationalisation (Data C). To this end, I enquired about the implementation of the internationalisation strategies that the interviewee seemed to mention often, and the reaction of deans, lecturers and students towards those strategies. For example, English as the medium of instruction (EMI) was emphasised as the core internationalisation strategy by both the Pro-Vice Chancellor in internationalisation and the head of *External Relations*. Therefore, I asked them such

questions as how EMI was implemented, what the challenges were, how was EMI received among lecturers and students.

- Finally, I asked the interviewees to identify the faculties they thought were active in internationalisation and to provide me with the contact of respective deans, in preparation for Stage 2 of data collection.

I wish to emphasise here that all interviews in this study, whether individual or in group, were semi-structured (Gillham, 2005). While I did have a clear agenda and certain topics I needed to cover (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), the interviews were more akin to an informal discussion where I asked open-ended questions and the interviewees had the freedom to talk about anything that came to mind. This might reveal issues that I could not have anticipated, thus providing an opportunity for further exploration of the topic at hand via probing questions (Gillham, 2005). Before concluding an interview, I made sure to ask the interviewees if there was anything unclear or that they wished to add.

All interviews were audio recorded unless requested otherwise and conducted in Vietnamese to make it easier for my participants to express themselves. I also kept notes of key points. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and then translated into English by myself. I tried to limit all interviews within 90 minutes, but if the interviewee(s) kept talking I would check whether they wished to move on and if so, the interview would continue for half an hour. In focus groups, participants were free to leave at any time.

With that said, I was only able to have one entry interview for *Blue*, which was with the Vice-Chancellor because the officer in charge of internationalisation was unreachable. Moreover, this interview was conducted before I obtained *Blue's* corporate strategy, so I could not ask anything from the document. Nonetheless, the Vice-Chancellor was extremely generous and gave me two sessions three days apart from one another, one lasting three hours and the other two hours. She told me that in order to understand *Blue's* internationalisation I had to understand its 25-year history and international roots, and proceeded to recount the university's growth from the 1990s. Her entry interview showed that *Blue* had a clear conceptualisation of internationalisation and a rather unconventional strategic approach to internationalisation (to be detailed in 4.2).

By comparison, two entry interviews were conducted at *Red*, one with the Pro-Vice Chancellor of internationalisation and another with the head of *External Relations*. The former lasted 60[16] minutes, while the latter lasted 90 minutes. The interviews helped me add

[16] Durations of interviews are rounded for readability.

a few more internationalisation strategies to the ones I discovered from the corporate strategy (see 5.1) and revealed how strategies were made at the university. All entry interviews at *Blue* and *Red* were recorded.

### 3.5.4. Stage 2: Dean interview

During entry interviews, I asked the participants to help me identify which faculties to focus on. Once these faculties were identified, their deans would be contacted and invited for an interview. The goal of this interview was to examine deans' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies. At the start of each interview, I would ask about the deans' academic and managerial background, including how they became dean of their respective faculties, and responsibilities as dean (Data D). I then asked them to describe the aspects and activities of their faculties that they deemed international, what they thought about them and how they managed them (Data C). Finally, the deans were asked whether and in what way they were aware of their universities' internationalisation strategies (Data C, potentially Data D). Directly afterwards, they would be presented with a list of internationalisation strategies (Data A), compiled in Stage 1, and asked to comment on each (Data C).

There were four dean interviews in this study, respectively with the deans of *Blue's Economics and Commerce* (two hours at his home) and *Language and Culture* (90 minutes at his home), deputy dean of *Red's Business School* (90 minutes on campus) and dean of *Red's Computer Science* (two hours on campus). Like the entry interviews, dean interviews were semi-structured, audio-recorded and conducted in Vietnamese.

An interesting outcome of both dean interviews at *Red* was that they led me to have another interview with the head of *External Relations*. To elaborate, when asked about how they managed joint programmes (a key internationalisation strategy of *Red*), the deans told me that they simply carried out orders from the top and that *Red's* governance was centralised. Thus, they suggested asking the head of *External Relations* as she was part of central management. I will account for this in more detail in Chapter 5. That said, the interview with the head of *External Relations* lasted 30 minutes, and this was in addition to an earlier entry interview with her as described in the last section.

### 3.5.5. Stage 2: Lecturer and student focus group and interview

For each faculty, there would be one focus group with lecturers and one with students. The aim was to uncover lecturers' and students' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies. The structure of each focus group paralleled that of dean interview: First, the participants

were asked about their background and how they became a lecturer/student of the university (Data D). The second part was a discussion where they would be asked to describe which aspects and activities of their faculties that they deemed international, and to give their opinions on them (Data C). Lastly, I would present them with a list of their university's internationalisation strategies (Data A) and ask for their comment on each (Data C). The participants were also enquired whether and in what way they were aware of the strategies (Data C).

There were two reasons the focus group method was chosen over individual interview for lecturers and students. On the one hand, focus group might provide richer data by drawing out the nuances and complexities of how a certain internationalisation strategy was made sense of (e.g. why EMI was well received by some students at *Red* but not others), as well as highlight issues that were important to lecturers or students as a group. On the other hand, focus group reduced if not eliminated the need to do multiple individual interviews and was therefore more convenient for me.

However, focus group was also more challenging than individual interview in terms of logistics for the participants and the management of their response time during discussion. I set up each focus group by sending a group email or, if feasible, creating a chat group on *Facebook* and include all group members, and ask them to suggest an appropriate date and time. Once everyone had agreed on the venue, I would make all the necessary arrangements (e.g. booking, buying refreshments) and arrive early on the interview day to welcome them. During the focus group, I maintained a moderator role and ensured that each member has the opportunity to voice his/her opinion and that only one person spoke at a time (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Were a response to require clarification or elaboration, I would politely interrupt and probe into it. If the group strayed from the topic being discussed, I would try to steer them back by asking about said topic (e.g. 'We were talking about the teaching quality of joint programmes. Could you elaborate more on it?').

With all that said, I was not able to conduct all the focus groups as desired. Apart from the focus groups with lecturers from *Red's Business School* and students from *Red's Computer Science*, the others were either missing some participants (e.g. only two out of five lecturers from *Blue's Economics and Commerce* were available for group interview) or not conducted at all (e.g. lecturers from *Blue's Language and Culture*). Therefore, individual interviews had to be held with those absent from focus groups. In the end, the interviews with lecturers and students were as follows:

*Table 8*. Lecturer and student focus groups and interviews

| ***Blue*** | ***Red*** |
|---|---|
| ***Economics and Commerce*** | ***Business School*** |
| Lecturer 1, 2: focus group (two hours) | Lecturer 1, 2, 3, 4: focus group (two hours) |
| Lecturer 3: individual (three hours) | Student 1, 2, 3, 4: focus group |
| Lecturer 4: individual (30 minutes) | (two hours and a half) |
| Lecturer 5: individual (40 minutes) | Student 5: individual (70 minutes) |
| Student 1, 2, 3, 4: focus group (two hours) | |
| Student 5: individual (60 minutes) | ***Computer Science*** |
| | Lecturer 1: individual (60 minutes) |
| ***Language and Culture*** | Lecturer 2: individual (90 minutes) |
| Lecturer 1: individual (60 minutes) | Lecturer 3: individual (70 minutes) |
| Lecturer 2: individual (90 minutes) | Lecturer 4: individual (10 minutes) |
| Lecturer 3: individual (two hours) | Student 1, 2, 3, 4: focus group |
| Lecturer 4: individual (90 minutes) | (100 minutes) |
| Student 1, 2: focus group (two hours) | |
| Student 3: individual (two hours) | ***Industrial Engineering*** |
| Student 4: individual (30 minutes) | Student 1: individual (90 minutes) |
| Student 5: individual (20 minutes) | Student 2: individual (70 minutes) |

The focus groups and interviews led me to request access to further documents that could contextualise what had been said. These were *Blue's* teaching regulations and a description of two contractual schemes for lecturers, and *Red's* syllabi and promotion materials (Data A, Data B). The documents will be featured in the case studies, presented in Chapter 4 and 5.

### 3.5.6. Stage 3: Member-checking interview

At the end of data collection, the participants in Stage 2 were invited for coffee as a token of my appreciation, and this meeting doubled as member-checking and follow-up. Those who took part in focus groups were invited as a group, and the rest were invited individually. The participants were provided with summaries and transcripts of their response, and I discussed with them my impressions of what they had said. Member-checking was both an opportunity for me to seek clarification and elaboration on Data C and Data D, and for the participants to feedback on my interpretation and request any modifications to the data if necessary. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member-checking is the 'most critical technique for establishing credibility' (p. 314). That said, the member-checking sessions were very casual (no audio recording) and the attendees were under no obligation to go through the transcripts on the spot. Those who were unavailable for the sessions were later sent an email with the summaries and transcripts.

Member-checking was conducted with the following participants:

*Table 9*. Lecturer and student member-checking

| ***Blue*** | ***Red*** |
|---|---|
| ***Economics and Commerce*** | ***Business School*** |
| Lecturer 1: individual (40 minutes) | Lecturer 1: individual (20 minutes) |
| Lecturer 2: individual (60 minutes) | Lecturer 3: individual (20 minutes) |
| Student 1, 2, 3, 4: group | Student 1, 2: group (60 minutes) |
| (two hours, coffee plus dinner) | |
| | ***Computer Science*** |
| ***Language and Culture*** | Lecturer 3: individual (30 minutes) |
| Lecturer 4: individual (30 minutes) | Student 1: individual (60 minutes) |
| Student 1: individual (40 minutes) | Student 2: individual |
| Student 2: individual (30 minutes) | (two hours, coffee plus dinner) |
| | ***Industrial Engineering*** |
| | Student 2: individual (60 minutes) |

In the end, there were no changes requested except one by a lecturer from *Red's Computer Science*, who told me not to report some critical assessments of the university.

### 3.5.7. Campus visits

Campus visits were initially planned to be a substantial data collection method. There were two types of campus visits:

- The first type consisted of one tour around campus (or more if necessary), either guided or unguided. The tour was taken in Stage 1, following document analysis and entry interview, so that I could familiarise myself with the campus layout and facilities, which would be useful for arranging interviews, and gather any visual evidence of the internationalisation strategies (Data A) that I had learned from documents and entry interviews. This visual evidence enriched my background understanding of the case and supplied materials for the participants to comment on during the interviews.
- The second type consisted of attendance, with permission, at various events or activities related to internationalisation. If possible, I would take part in the events in order to observe from an insider, or *emic* point of view (Creswell, 2013). This made the second type of campus visits quasi-ethnographic in the sense that I would become immersed in the research setting, but not in a prolonged manner. The goal of such campus visits was to develop an indepth understanding of certain internationalisation strategies (Data A) and acquire glimpses into the innerworkings of the university (Data B). Visual evidence would also be collected, again with permission, for subsequent interviews.

Due to the ownership dispute at *Blue* and summer vacation at *Red*, the campus visit method was not successfully implemented in this study. To begin with, campus tours at both *Blue*

and *Red* had to be conducted before document analysis and entry interview because at the time no other data collection activity was possible, and I was anxious that I was making no progress. Therefore, I did not have a basis of reference for focusing my attention, and consequently each tour took very long (four hours) and was tiring because I had to make sense of everything I saw. On the other hand, the second type of campus visits quickly became unfeasible as my gatekeeper at *Blue* (the Vice-Chancellor) was dismissed, and *Red* had entered summer vacation when my fieldwork at it started. Nonetheless, I managed to conduct a few second-type campus visits:

- A presentation at a conference on higher education and globalisation at *Blue*, four hours
- A presentation at a training workshop on research methodology at *Blue*, four hours
- Attendance at strategic meetings between *Blue's* top management and the faculties, 12 hours in total
- Attendance at one of *Red's* open days, five hours
- Attendance at a pre-departure meeting for students of joint programmes between *Red* and a British university, one hour

### 3.5.8. Social media analysis

Contrary to all the methods described above, social media was not planned as a data collection method at all and yet was added to good effects. During my interviews with students from both universities, I was recommended by them to read *Blue Confession* and *Red Social*, both being *Facebook* communities. To elaborate, *Facebook* is one of the largest social media platforms in the world at the moment. *Facebook* users each have their own personal page where they write what they think or post photos and videos. Other users can interact with them by commenting on what they have posted or chatting. Besides the default personal pages, *Facebook* users have the option create community pages (e.g. baking in England) and invite other users to join, and members of a community can contribute to it by writing and posting media on the shared page. Communities are either public (anyone can read, post and comment on posts) or closed (only members can read, post and comment on posts). *Blue Confession* and *Red Social* were public communities, but were set up in a way that all posts had to be vetted and anonymised by an anonymous group of administrators. Comments on posts, however, were not vetted or anonymised.

I followed the students' recommendations and perused both *Blue Confession* and *Red Social*. I was able to find a lot of discussions on internationalisation-related issues. For example, from late 2016 to 2017 there were multiple posts on *Red Social* complaining about the quality of a private language centre that the university contracted to provide English courses for students of joint programmes. From the posts, I could clearly see how the students framed the problem being discussed and how they shared information, thereby gaining

insights into their sensemaking. In this way, social media served as archival records (Yin, 2018) and was a rich source of Data C and Data D.

Moreover, I interacted with many participants via *Facebook*, especially students. Initially my goal was to keep in touch with them and develop rapport (e.g. two students from *Red* shared my hobby), and I had no intention of collecting data via social media. However, sometimes they asked me to help them with work or study (e.g. two students from *Red* asked me to teach them English writing) and proceeded to discuss a certain issue on campus (e.g. mispronunciation of English words by lecturers). In such cases I did help them but made it clear that I could not discuss their universities or offer advice on how they should act on campus. In other words, I tried my best to build trust and rapport without compromising my stance as a researcher or intervening in the research site. Nonetheless, our conversations provided me with additional insights into the participants' sensemaking (Data C, Data D) and *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies (Data A). To ensure that I was not exploiting them by accident, I asked the participants if I could use our online conversations as data, to which they all agreed.

### 3.5.9. Amount of data

The total amount of data gathered from both cases is as follows:

- Approximately 60 hours of interview, of which 7.5 hours were entry interview
- Five documents: *Blue's* corporate strategy, *Red's* corporate strategy, *Blue's* teaching regulations, description of two contractual schemes for *Blue* lecturers, *Red's* syllabi, and numerous promotion materials by *Red*
- Approximately 26 hours of campus visits
- 10 pages of transcripts from social media conversations

## 3.6. Data analysis

Data analysis was thematic and followed a four-stage procedure, drawing on the tradition of *first* and *second order* analysis (Van Maanen, 1979; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Balogun & Johnson, 2005) and Eisenhardt's (1989) case-based theory building. The stages were: (1) holistic exploration, (2) single-case thick description and first-order coding, (3) cross-case comparison, and finally (4) theorisation (or second-order analysis). The multiple stages helped me to gradually develop a firm grasp of the data and exhaust it before theorising from it.

The first stage was conducted simultaneously to data collection and involved a holistic, purely descriptive exploration of data. The aim was for me to familiarise myself with the data

and notice key issues for subsequent interviews. In Stage 2, familiarity with data then assisted in constructing thick descriptions of the sensemaking praxis around each of *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies. From these descriptions, themes and patterns in the sensemaking of deans, lecturers and students at each university could emerge and be coded using the participants' own words; the resulting codes comprised my first-order findings. In Stage 3, the codes from each case, along with the empirical evidence they represented, were compared so that cross-case patterns in the sensemaking of each non-leader group could be uncovered. In the last stage, sensemaking theory was applied to generate theoretical explanations for the comparative patterns in Stage 3; these explanations became my second-order findings. The four sub-sections below will describe each stage in detail.

### 3.6.1. Stage 1: Getting to know the data and preliminary impressions

The first stage was conducted simultaneously to data collection. After collecting one data source (e.g. entry interview with a top manager), I made sure to finish transcribing it before collecting the next source, if possible. Next, I read through the whole transcript to develop a holistic impression of the data. In parallel, excerpts from the transcript were selected and sorted according to the four data types described in 3.2.3. Each excerpt was labelled to facilitate retrieval. Table 10 below provides an example:

*Table 10*. Getting to know the data

| Source | Data A: internationalisation strategies | Data B: background information about the university | Data C: non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies | Data D: background information about non-leaders' |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Entry interview with *Blue's* Vice-Chancellor | **1. Internationalisation as vision:** *Vietnam had to be part of the world; we must not make ourselves a stand-alone exception. Likewise, Vietnamese higher education and Blue in particular had to be compatible with everyone else; we must respect the knowledge and values mankind has fought so hard for. Simply put, our vision was to become a normal university among normal universities.* **2. Research as internationalisation:** *Forming international research collaborations was my idea. Everyone said it was impossible, so I myself went and form one with a few colleagues in Canada and France to make a point.* | **1. Establishment:** *In the 90s we started as a vocational school in clerical work and multimedia. It was purely an initiative of several lecturers from major universities in Saigon.* | | **1. Deans' role:** *I hire deans to develop the faculties, not operate them. Operation is the responsibility of deputy deans […] [The deans of Economics and Commerce, and Language and Culture] perfectly understood this.* |

Thus, Stage 1 analysis was much more descriptive than analytical. Nonetheless, the holistic reading and categorised excerpts acquainted me with the data and helped identify issues that needed more attention when collecting further data. Moreover, Stage 1 prepared the building blocks for constructing thick descriptions in Stage 2.

### 3.6.2. Stage 2: Single-case thick description and first-order analysis

The second stage began after all data had been collected and member-checked. This stage drew upon the insights and building blocks from Stage 1 to construct thick descriptions of the sensemaking praxis around each internationalisation strategy in each university. The procedure for each strategy was as follows:

- First, I looked for all excerpts about a certain internationalisation strategy from the Data A column (Table 10 above), and wrote a description of that strategy, including its content, rationale and implementation.
- Second, I contextualised the strategy using relevant excerpts from the Data B column.
- Third, excerpts of how the strategy was made sense of by deans, lecturers and students were extracted from Data C column and woven into a thick, narrative-like description of the sensemaking praxis around that strategy. Here my holistic understanding of the data guided the development of the narrative.
- Finally, I fleshed out the description by adding Data D and any other relevant data.

The aggregation of thick descriptions for one university constituted said university's case study. Chapter 4 and 5 will report the case study of *Blue* and *Red*, respectively.

Once a thick description was made for every internationalisation strategy of *Blue* and *Red*, it became apparent that the outcomes of their internationalisation strategies, sometimes even the strategies themselves, were shaped by the sensemaking of their respective non-leaders (see Chapter 4 and 5). However, the thick descriptions were not useful for examining the sensemaking features of each non-leader group, which were necessary to answer the research question. This was because, as mentioned above, the descriptions placed deans, lecturers and students together in a narrative of sensemaking praxis, consequently blurring the boundaries between their sensemaking. Even so, the descriptions strongly suggested there was distinction among the three groups, both within and across institutions (e.g. the sensemaking of *Blue* deans was different from that of *Blue* lecturers and *Red* deans). This stipulated further analysis to delineate the manner in which sensemaking was done by each non-leader group.

Returning to the thick descriptions of the internationalisation strategies of each university, I started conducting single-case first-order analysis. First, the thick description of each strategy was analysed to find key sensemaking issues around it, which were noted and given a code using the participants' own words. The codes were then sorted according to non-leader groups (e.g. codes from lecturers will be placed together). This coding and sorting process was repeated until I had exhausted the thick description of every internationalisation strategy. Next, a comparison was performed between codes pertaining to one group but across strategies in order to uncover key themes and patterns in the sensemaking of said group. These themes and patterns were once again coded using verbatim phrases from the data. The resulting codes and their empirical evidence constituted my first-order findings. Table 11 below provides an example of first-order analysis for *Blue*.

*Table 11*. Sample of first-order analysis for *Blue*

| Strategy | Sensemaking issue | Key theme (first-order findings) |
|---|---|---|
| Research | *You have no carrot you cannot tell people to do research even when it is a good thing. Lecturers always do what is in their best interests to maximise personal utility.*<br>(Lecturer 1 of *Economics and Commerce*)<br>**Code: carrot** | **Personal utility**: *Blue* lecturers made sense of internationalisation strategies by weighing them up against personal utility |
| Anti-plagiarism | *Again we have to remember what is the bread here: teaching. A lecturer maintains his bread with good students' feedback. [Students] will always get caught by Turnitin however many times they revise. What are you supposed to do? Fail them and get terrible feedback? […] 'Oh this lecturer is very difficult, do not ask him for supervision or enrol in his classes'.*<br>(Lecturer 3 of *Economics and Commerce*)<br>**Code: bread** | |

### 3.6.3. Stage 3: Cross-case comparative analysis

In Stage 3, first-order findings from both cases were compared to generate larger, cross-case themes with regards to how sensemaking was done by each non-leader group. There were two types of comparisons, conducted in sequence. In the beginning, first-order findings of the same non-leader group across two cases (e.g. deans) were compared to examine how said group made sense of internationalisation strategies and how differences in organisational contexts affected its sensemaking. Themes and patterns of similarities and differences were coded; these were called *intragroup* codes. Once cross-case sensemaking patterns of all three non-leader groups were established, they were compared with one another. This second comparison revealed the ways in which one group's sensemaking was similar or different from another's. The resulting themes and patterns were represented with *intergroup* codes. Table 12 on next page provides an example of Stage 3 analysis.

*Table 12*. Cross-case comparative analysis
*Note: Due to space constraints, I cannot include the empirical evidence for first-order codes, as done in Table 11. Therefore, only a summary is provided.*

| Non-leader group | First-order findings | Intragroup findings | Intergroup findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Blue* deans | **Documents and daily observation:** Empirical data shows that *Blue* deans made sense of internationalisation strategies by reading strategic documents and observing their faculties through daily work. According to the Vice-Chancellor, they were hired to develop the faculties, not operate them, and therefore it was necessary for them to be aware of *Blue's* strategy. | **Role and information source:** Deans with a more strategically important role were given strategic documents. Deans with a more administrative role were not and felt no need to. | **Role and information source:** The organisational role of each group affected their access to information, and motivation to gain access. |
| *Red* deans | **Doing the job:** Empirical data shows that *Red* deans made sense of internationalisation strategies by simply observing what was happening daily in the faculty. Their role at *Red* was to take care of daily administration and sometimes carry out a top-down strategic initiative. They had no access to strategic documents nor found the necessity to. | | |
| *Blue* students | **Simply studying:** Interview response from *Blue* students shows they made sense of internationalisation strategies using their daily experiences as a student. They had no access to strategic information or found the need to. | **Studies and strategic information:** Almost all students had no access to strategic information and relied on daily experiences to make sense of internationalisation strategies. They considered strategic matter irrelevant to their studies. | |
| *Red* students | **Simply studying:** Interview response from *Red* students shows they made sense of internationalisation strategies using their daily experiences as a student. A few had access to strategic information due their special position within the university (e.g. studying a module taught by the Vice-Chancellor). However, all of them were uninterested in strategies, which were deemed irrelevant to their studies. | | |

The intragroup and intergroup findings provided the direct basis for theorisation in the final stage of analysis.

### 3.6.4. Stage 4: Theorisation (second-order analysis)

Theorisation, or second-order analysis, took place in the fourth stage. In this stage, sensemaking theory was applied to theoretically discuss both intragroup and intergroup

patterns of internationalisation-strategy sensemaking. All discussions resulted in my second-order findings. At the same time, however, it was found that some findings could not be precisely discussed with sensemaking theory or even problematised it. In these cases, I tried to derive a theoretical expansion or counterpoint to sensemaking theory from such findings and integrate it into my second-order findings. For example, I found that most of the time non-leaders made sense of internationalisation strategies by resolving the ambiguities of their mundane organisational life. This finding stood in contrast to sensemaking theory, which posits sensemaking as an episodic, intensive activity during crises or disruptive events (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) (refer back to 2.2.3.2). Therefore, I inductively derived two counterpoints to sensemaking theory, namely implicit sensemaking and mundane sensemaking, and integrated them into my second-order findings.

The second-order findings together provided the answer to my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* In turn, they enabled me to draw theoretical contributions to not only higher education internationalisation but also SAP and sensemaking theory.

## 3.7. Ethics

The ethical principles of this study were based on guidelines by the *British Educational Research Association* (BERA, 2011). Ethical approval was first obtained from the University of Bath, to which this study is registered. Informed consent was then sought in two stages during participant recruitment, as detailed in 3.4.4.

Ethics was also upheld throughout data collection. First, the participants were involved as interviewees only and no extra workload was made on them. Second, in order to preserve their anonymity I did not share or discuss my data with anyone, and I tried to be discreet when seeing them on campus, especially at *Blue*. Third, I respected the participants' privacy outside of the interviews and did not disrupt their daily routine although I might ask after them from time to time via *Facebook* or text message. Fourth, I arranged the interviews to be as comfortable and convenient for them as possible by letting them decide the venue and, in the case of focus groups, preparing refreshments for them. The participants were given the freedom to refuse to answer questions they found inappropriate, withdraw from an interview or even the study. All interviews ended with my thanks and a friendly chat to build rapport. Fifth, their response and my impressions were member-checked before I analysed the data to ensure that I did not misrepresent them or report certain findings that they felt uncomfortable with. Finally upon departure, I will send an individualised thank you letter to each participant and maintain contact afterwards. If at any points the participants felt unclear about the purpose of my study and their role, I would answer their questions honestly and in

a straightforward manner, but I made it clear that certain information (e.g. the identity of other participants) could not be disclosed for ethical reasons.

The integration of social media presented challenges in terms of privacy and my detached stance as a researcher, as it allowed the participants and I to interact on a personal basis without spatial or temporal constraints. To avoid complications, I refrained from contacting them about matters not related to the study, except occasional greetings and catch-ups to maintain relations. As stated in 3.5.8, however, sometimes I did help with their requests concerning work or study, and our online conversations eventually touched on matters on campus. I tried not to discuss those matters indepth, neither did I side with or against them when they were making complaints, or give them advice on they should act on campus. The furthest I would go was to listen sympathetically and reciprocate with my own stories when relevant. In addition, if I wanted to incorporate what they said into the data, I made a point of asking for permission.

The acquisition of documents and conduct of campus visits were always preceded by permission. During my campus visits, I was careful not to disrupt anyone.

All data was anonymised by assigning participants and universities with codes. That said, I acknowledge there is always a risk of identification arising from thickly described case studies. The data has been entirely kept for my own use.

## 3.8. Trustworthiness

Quality was observed by adopting Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of *trustworthiness*, which consists of three criteria: credibility, transferability and dependability. These criteria provided a much needed quality framework dedicated to qualitative research (see also Stenbacka, 2001; Flyvbjerg, 2011) and served as the counterpart to the more quantitative-focused criteria of internal validity, external validity and reliability, respectively.

This section outlines the measures, based on Shenton's (2004) suggestions, that were taken to enhance credibility (3.8.1), transferability (3.8.2) and dependability (3.8.3).

### 3.8.1. Credibility

Credibility means that my findings had to be congruent with the micro-level organisational reality at *Blue* and *Red* (Merriam, 1998). In operational terms, credibility demanded that my data collection methods enable an indepth exploration of university non-leaders' sensemaking praxis and that the final report, which would be this thesis, convey the richness and complexities of the data to readers. To start with, my comparative case design has incorporated multiple methods and varied data sources (e.g. students of different cohorts, faculties, universities) which together captured a rich and vivid account of micro-level sensemaking and, through triangulation, brought to the fore its nuances and complexities. The sequence in which the methods were deployed added to credibility by first helping me build up a firm background understanding of my target universities' internationalisation strategies (document analysis, entry interview, campus visit), which then informed and enriched the direct investigation of deans, lecturers and students' sensemaking (interview, focus group, social media). The way I approached my participants also enhanced data quality and by extension credibility as I tried my best to uphold ethical standards and establish trust and rapport without compromising my detachment as a researcher or intervening in the research sites. At the end of data collection, the participants had the opportunity to feedback on the data and my impressions of their response. Other credibility measures included

- the use of semi-structured interview with open questions, probes and follow-up questions
- frequent reflection on my impressions of the data to identify and reduce potential bias
- keeping the data collection methods open to adjustments based on collected data. For example, thanks to the first few student interviews I was able to add social media as a method.

To improve the credibility of the final report (see Chapter 4 and 5), a detailed institutional profile of *Blue* and *Red* was provided to contextualise empirical and theoretical findings about non-leaders' sensemaking. Thick description of the case studies would then be presented, weaving together as much data as possible and keeping participants' quotes whole.

### 3.8.2. Transferability

In accordance with transferability, my goal is not to produce findings that are externally valid or generalisable, but to help readers draw their own conclusions as to the implications and application of the findings to their own contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To this end, I have provided a thick description of the cases in Chapter 4 and 5, followed by a thorough cross-case analysis in Chapter 6 and, finally in Chapter 7, a discussion in which I tried to exhaust the data and relevant literature. The theoretical contributions and practical implications were

also clearly outlined towards the end of the thesis. In this way, what I did to improve the transferability of my study also contributes to its credibility.

### 3.8.3. Dependability

Dependability demands that my study enable future researchers to repeat it, but unlike reliability, this quality criterion acknowledges that results might not be replicated, due to the changing nature of social life (Shenton, 2004; Creswell, 2013). To warrant dependability, I made sure that all of my methodological choices were reasoned and consistent among themselves and with my research question, theoretical framework and pragmatic stance. The emergent decisions that I took during fieldwork, most importantly my perseverance with *Blue* and *Red*, were also carefully considered. Finally, all of these have been reported in this very chapter, which accounts for a substantial portion of the thesis.

## 3.9. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has described and explained the methodology of my study, which has to satisfy the demands for depth of the research question as well as the SAP approach and sensemaking theory. There is no necessity, however, for the methodology to conform to any ontological or epistemological assumptions due to my paradigmatic stance of pragmatism. Thus, a qualitative, comparative case study design has been adopted, based on a synthesis of ideas from prominent case study scholars like Eisenhardt (1989), Stake (1995) and Yin (2018). The adoption of case study is also motivated by its popularity in prior SAP research (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Jarzabkowski, Sillince, & Shaw, 2010). The major elements of my design can be summarised as follows:

- The research context was the city of Saigon in Vietnam.
- Two Vietnamese universities, coded *Blue* and *Red*, were chosen as cases for their explicit internationalisation strategies and active pursuit of the strategies. Each university was expected to provide data on its own internationalisation strategies and the sensemaking of these strategies by non-leaders (deans, lecturers and students). Background information about the university and any non-leaders involved as participants was also necessary.
- Data was collected with semi-structured interview, focus group, document analysis, quasi-ethnographic campus visit and social media analysis. The data collection methods were arranged into a three-stage procedure for each university: The first stage established the profile of the university, including its internationalisation strategies. The second stage examined the sensemaking of internationalisation strategies by non-leaders. The third stage was member-checking with participants.
- Participants for interview included a top manager, an officer in internationalisation, and deans, lecturers and students from two faculties that were active in internationalisation.

- Data was analysed through four stages: (1) holistic exploration, (2) single-case thick description and first-order coding, (3) cross-case comparison, and finally (4) theorisation (second-order analysis). This procedure was inspired by the tradition of *first* and *second order* analysis (Van Maanen, 1979; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and Eisenhardt's (1989) case-based theory building.
- Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *trustworthiness* was employed as the quality framework. In addition, ethics was maintained throughout the study, with emphasis on honesty, anonymity, privacy and the participants' interests.

Despite careful planning, the conduct of this study was significantly adjusted due to complications with access to both *Blue* and *Red*. The number of participants at both universities was fewer than intended with recruitment being highly opportunistic. Moreover, specific steps in the data collection procedure had to be adapted in each case.

Nonetheless, substantial data was collected, with 60 hours of interview, 26 hours of campus visits, 10 pages of transcripts from social media conversations and numerous documents (including *Blue* and *Red's* corporate strategy). This data was used to construct the case studies of *Blue* and *Red*, which will be respectively presented in the next two chapters.

# CHAPTER 4: BLUE – UNCONVENTIONAL INTERNATIONALISATION

Chapter 4, 5 and 6 present the empirical findings of this study, each chapter having a unique and indispensable role in providing raw materials for answering my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* Chapter 4 and 5 will respectively present the case studies of the two Vietnamese universities studied: *Blue* and *Red*. Each chapter begins with the contextual information of one university, including its history, corporate strategy, internationalisation strategies and organisational structure. I will then report how the internationalisation strategies of said university were made sense of by its three non-leader groups (deans, lecturers, students). As shall be seen, the two case studies empirically show that the strategic management of internationalisation depends as much on having clear and appropriate strategies as on the sensemaking of non-leaders. I wish to note, however, that due to the space constraint of this thesis, only the strategies that yielded the most thematically diverse interview accounts from the most groups will be included. While such selectivity enhances the richness of my theoretical findings, the two downsides are that my study only paints a partial picture of *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation and places at the margins the participants whose response did not focus on the strategies being reported.

Chapter 6 will then present cross-case comparative analyses of how each non-leader group from *Blue* and *Red* made sense of their HEIs' internationalisation strategies. While Chapter 4 and 5 provide evidence for the role of *Blue* and *Red* non-leaders' sensemaking in the strategic management of internationalisation, Chapter 6 aims to delineate the manner in which sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was done by them. To this end, interview accounts from *Blue* (Chapter 4) and *Red* (Chapter 5) will be organised and compared on a group basis (e.g. all the interview data from deans is put together) so that group-specific themes and patterns may emerge. These intragroup themes will in turn reveal intergroup similarities and differences. Moreover, Chapter 6 will enrich the comparative analyses by pulling in background information about the groups being compared (e.g. *Blue* and *Red* students' perception of their place in the universities). This data is not included in Chapter 4 and 5 because it would make the two chapters convoluted. That said, it is Chapter 6 that provides the direct materials for theoretical discussion and answering my research question, which is in Chapter 7.

I wish to state that my study provides no evaluation of the content of *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies. The focus of this study is on the sensemaking of internationalisation strategies by non-leaders, rather than the strategies themselves. Therefore, *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies are taken as given.

With all that said, I will now report the empirical findings of this study, starting with the case study of *Blue*. This chapter includes five sections: Section 4.1 introduces the codes for participants and other data sources in order to facilitate reading of Chapter 4, 5 and 6. It will

also briefly talk about a major issue in my empirical findings: Most participants were neither interested nor aware of their HEIs' internationalisation strategies. Section 4.2 provides contextual information of *Blue*, most importantly its corporate strategy and unconventional internationalisation strategies. The next three sections each report interview data surrounding one internationalisation strategy of *Blue*, namely research (4.3), anti-plagiarism (4.4) and language (4.5).

## 4.1. Important notes for reading the data

### 4.1.1. Data coding

The participants are coded using acronyms that are put in the formula of *institution_role_faculty*. The acronyms are as follows:

*Table 13*. Participant coding

| Institution | Role | Faculty |
|---|---|---|
| **B**: *Blue*<br>**R**: *Red* | **TM**: top manager<br>**MM**: middle manager<br>(including dean, deputy dean and functional manager, all of which are present in this study)<br>**L**: lecturer<br>**S**: student | acronyms will be explained in the text |

A number is also put after role, without underscore, to differentiate between different participants in the same role. As an example, R_L1_CS is lecturer number 1 in the faculty of *Computer Science* at *Red*.

Apart from interviews, this study has three other sources of data, which are also woven in the case studies. They are documents (*institution_D*), campus visit (*institution_CV*), and social media (*institution_SM*).

### 4.1.2. Major empirical issue: Sensemaking of internationalisation strategies as embedded in sensemaking of role

There was one major empirical issue during the interviews that left far-reaching implications for the reporting and discussion of my data. That is, most of the deans, lecturers and students involved in this study were neither interested nor aware of their universities' internationalisation strategies. This short section will briefly describe this issue in order to clarify and preface which data will be included in Chapter 4, 5 and 6.

For most deans, lecturers and students at *Blue* and *Red*, internationalisation was never a subject to consciously think about. Instead, they made sense of what they had to do in their own roles (e.g. teaching) and through this process developed an implicit understanding of any internationalisation strategies that happened to be reflected by the tasks and experiences of their roles. One good example was a dean from *Red*: He had never thought about the university's various accreditations (international accreditation was one of *Red's* internationalisation strategies, see 5.1) until he was tasked with getting his faculty accredited by an American body – in other words, until accreditation became part of his role. Another example was lecturers from *Blue*, who made sense of its research strategy (academic research was an internationalisation strategy for *Blue*, though unconventional as it sounds, see 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) only by engaging in research and observing its impact on remuneration and promotion.

As a result, the non-leaders from both *Blue* and *Red* rarely talked about internationalisation strategies by themselves. Rather, accounts of internationalisation strategies were part of those of role-related matters. These role matters were wide ranging, such as one's own management style (for deans), teaching philosophy (for lecturers) and degree completion (for students). Indeed, role matters were brought up as a lead-in into or elaboration of issues to do with internationalisation. Hereunder are some interview quotes to illustrate this co-presence:

- One dean at *Red* described his own management style to elaborate on how he implemented an internationalisation strategic initiative: 'You should not be detached from your staff. If you work and play with them closely you will know their morale, difficulties, or if there is problems with the computers […] You also see if they are with you.'
- When asked what she knew about *Red's* internationalisation strategies, one lecturer referred to her own role to lead into her response: 'Strategy is a concern for the top. They have to decide where everyone is heading. We cannot do that. We just teach. I don't know anything about internationalisation strategy, but I can talk about, for example, some international research projects I did with colleagues abroad.'
- One student at *Blue* described her life on campus to explain her non-awareness of an internationalisation strategic initiative that dealt with academic integrity: 'There are so many events and extra-curricular activities happening all year round. I cannot keep track of them all. I think I have seen events related to academic integrity, but I was not part of it, nor was I interested.'

As can be seen, these accounts placed internationalisation within the participants' broader role experiences as deans, lecturers and students.

All this meant that the participants' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was embedded within sensemaking of their respective roles. However, there were circumstances, albeit very few, where this embeddedness was problematised. One dean at *Blue* was

recruited in order to push any component strategies[17] of his choice in his faculty. There were no pre-determined responsibilities for him, except reporting to top management (daily administration was taken care of by the deputy dean); thus, the dean was given total freedom as to what he could do at least in his first term. The dean started his position by examining *Blue's* corporate strategy and the existing conditions of his faculty, which led him to choose one specific internationalisation strategy to push (4.3). In the end, he devised three initiatives for that strategy. It can be seen that the deans' sensemaking of said internationalisation strategy was not embedded in his sensemaking of role responsibilities, because his role was not specified to begin with. On the contrary, this dean's choice to push this particular internationalisation strategy *defined* his role.

That non-leaders' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is embedded in role sensemaking has clear implications for how data will be reported and discussed. First, my empirical findings will often include accounts of role-related matters in parallel to accounts of internationalisation strategies, as shall be seen in this chapter and Chapter 5, 6. For instance, Section 4.3.3 will describe the impact of *Blue* lecturers' concern about their livelihood and professional development on their sensemaking of several research initiatives. Second, any ensuing theoretical discussion must reflect the embeddedness; however, I will come back to this in the theoretical discussion in Chapter 7.

With all that said, below is the case study of *Blue*.

## 4.2. Institutional profile

*Blue* was established in the early 90s as a private, not-for-profit vocational school. It was the initiative of several academics from different universities in Saigon, including B_TM, and was supported by a French-Vietnamese association and a French Chamber of Commerce. *Blue* offered two-year programmes in clerical work, managerial information system and multi-media, the structure of which was uniquely modelled after two types of technical education in France so that there would be one semester of placement either locally or overseas following one of study. Graduates would receive a degree co-signed with the aforementioned Chamber of Commerce. *Blue* additionally stood out for

- being the first postsecondary institution in Saigon, if not in Vietnam to have a 1:1 student-to-computer ratio during laboratory sessions

[17] As noted in Chapter 2, a component or functional strategy can be thought of as either a collective of specific strategies that are similar in purpose, or those specific strategies. In this study it is used in the former sense. For example, *Blue* had five component strategies: *Teaching and learning, Research, International relations, Human resources, Infrastructure* (see 4.2.1). These component strategies also served as the internationalisation component strategy (see 4.2.2).

- its emphasis on students' foreign language (English and French) competence. *Blue* established its own language centre.
- having internationally educated and foreign staff. 90% of *Blue's* students were employed upon graduation, some landing jobs in foreign companies or even outside Vietnam.

At the end of the century, *Blue* applied and was granted college[18] status by the then Prime Minister. It consequently gave up some freedom in programme design and degree awarding due to strict governmental regulations on these two areas. For instance, it must include Leninism in the curriculum while losing the alternating placement/study semesters. According to the Vice-Chancellor (B_TM), what the institution hoped to achieve by becoming college was official recognition of its programmes and in turn the ability to influence public colleges with its innovative practices. In 2000, B_TM, who was then an academic staff, was appointed Vice-Chancellor (VC).

This period was short-lived as only six years later *Blue* moved on to become a university. This was a necessary step for it to regain some of the lost freedom and enhance its standing in Vietnamese higher education. In 2009, a formal strategy was written, marking the first strategic period as a university from 2010 to 2020.

### 4.2.1. Corporate strategy

*Blue's* vision was

> *To become a Vietnamese university that asserts a leading position in education quality and community-oriented research that is recognised internationally.* (B_D)

This vision was the evolution of what *Blue's* founder had in mind when establishing the institution, even though back then it was only a vocational school:

> *He said Vietnam had to be part of the world; we must not make ourselves a stand-alone exception. Likewise, Vietnamese higher education and Blue in particular had to be compatible with everyone else; we must respect the knowledge and values mankind has fought so hard for. Simply put, our vision was to become a normal university among normal universities.* (B_TM)

It was this colloquial expression of 'being normal' that was propagated institution-wide rather than the formal vision statement (B_MM_EC; B_MM_LC; B_L1_EC).

[18] In Vietnam, colleges are higher education institutions that provide three-year programmes, while universities provide four-year programmes with substantially more academic content.

According to B_TM, 'being normal' meant *Blue* must possess the 'universal values' of academic freedom, integrity, accountability, transparency and social responsibility, while performing the 'essential functions' of education, research and community service. This emphasis on normality, as defined by *Blue*, was also key to its internationalisation (see 4.2.2).

The vision was accompanied by the mission statement

> *Create equal opportunities in education*
>
> *Produce graduates who can adapt, learn lifelong and possess the capability to compete in a changing global environment*
>
> *Contribute to fast, sustainable and humanistic development of the economy, society in Vietnam and the region*
>
> (B_D)

To realise its vision and mission, *Blue* developed five component strategies: *Teaching and learning*, *Research*, *International relations*, *Human resources*, and *Infrastructure*. Each component strategy included several specific strategies (stated in the form of an *action plan*), to which key performance indicators were assigned.

All component strategies were underpinned by *Blue's* seven core values, namely *learning spirit*, *critical thinking*, *responsibility*, *integrity*, *respect for diversity*, *dynamism and creativity*, *commitment to quality*. The university also had a slogan that represented its corporate strategy and most of the seven values: 'Live ethically, Learn conscientiously, Connect with the world'.

The corporate strategy was the outcome of retreats in late 2000s involving the board of directors, top management, middle management and consultants. The *Administrative Office* was in charge of putting everything into words.

### 4.2.2. Internationalisation strategies: An unconventional perspective

Paradoxically, internationalisation at *Blue* was a well conceptualised, and yet ambiguous strategic area. To begin with, internationalisation was conceptualised as 'recognition [by] and connection to' universities around the world and 'the ability to make international students and scholars feel no different than home' (B_TM). However, the VC emphasised that *Blue* did not want to become an international university, which to her was 'meaningless' (ibid.), but rather a Vietnamese university

recognised internationally, which showed strong consideration for the local context. It can be seen that this conceptualisation was remarkably reminiscent of *Blue's* corporate vision, stated in 4.2.1. As explained by the VC, the reason was that the corporate strategy itself *was* the internationalisation strategy. Simply put, *Blue* strongly believed that it could become international simply by 'being normal', which involved possessing the universal values and performing the essential functions of a university (also mentioned in 4.2.1). In fact, the VC said that a 'normal' university was intrinsically international (B_TM).

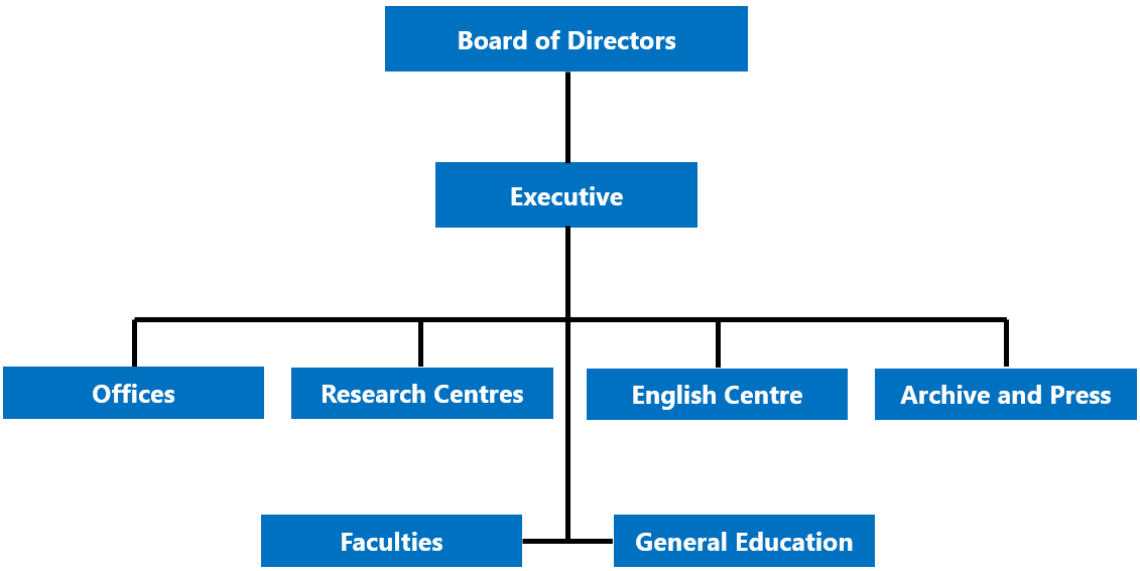
In this way, because all five component strategies (4.2.1) were developed to help *Blue* realise its vision of 'being normal', they together constituted the component strategy of internationalisation, and indeed there was no explicit internationalisation strategy at all except for *international relations*. In other words, anything and everything could be internationalisation at *Blue*.

As a result, strategies that are not conventionally called internationalisation were *Blue's* internationalisation strategies. These included, for example, conducting and publishing academic research, preventing plagiarism, promoting academic freedom. The VC said that 'what [was] taken for granted around the world [was] the things *Blue* strived for', and achieving them meant *Blue* could stand among universities internationally.

### 4.2.3. Organisational structure

The structure of *Blue* was rather simple, as depicted below:

*Figure* 5. *Blue's* organisational structure



A private organisation, *Blue* had shareholders comprising its own staff and private investors, a few of whom were actually other private universities in Saigon. Shareholders met every five years to vote on the board of directors who were to appoint a VC, participate in strategy making and oversee its execution by the executive or top management. At the time of data collection there were three people in the executive, B_TM as the VC and two PVCs, one in charge of teaching and the other of research and students' activities. Daily administration was handled by the 11 offices: *Administrative*, *Infrastructure*, *Accounting*, *Communication and Recruitment*, *Information Technology*, *Internal Auditing*, *Human Resources*, *Academic*, *International Cooperations*, *Research*, *Quality Assurance*. Teaching and research were done by four different parties:

- four faculties: *Economics and Commerce*, *Language and Culture*, *Science and Technology*, *Professional Training*[19]
- two research centres: *Tourism*, *Gender*
- *English Centre*, which also provided commercial courses for the public
- *General Education*, which was a department specialising in liberal education. It offered courses for all students in, for example, ethics, worldview, critical thinking. *General Education* was one of the unique features of the university (B_TM).

Now that the institutional profile of *Blue* has been provided, I will report how three internationalisation strategies were made sense of by the university's non-leaders, starting with research (4.3), followed by anti-plagiarism (4.4) and language (4.5).

## 4.3. Research: An ideal strategy against existing patterns

Academic research was a central piece in *Blue's* vision to become a normal and thus international university. It was stated as a component strategy in the corporate strategy, with the overall goal being:

> *Create a research culture and build transnational research groups around key issues that are imperative to the society and to the development of Blue.* (B_D)

*Research* was to be achieved via five specific strategies:

> *Create appropriate policies and regulations for academic and applied research and technology transfer*
>
> *Promote research collaborations via joint projects and conferences with domestic and foreign individuals and organisations*

[19] *Professional Training* delivered *Blue's* vocational programmes.

> *Develop the research capacity of academic staff via training programmes, enable them to access cutting edge research by inviting international scholars to work as visiting lecturers*
>
> *Encourage academic staff to publish domestically and internationally, create a research bulletin to showcase and disseminate staff's works internally*
>
> *Provide seed funding for projects so that researchers could proceed to seek external funding from governmental and non-governmental organisations and businesses*
>
> (ibid.)

A committee, whose members were drawn from the faculties and offices, was established to implement *Research*. The component strategy, however, yielded little result for the first two years since its introduction in 2010, and in fact it was not well implemented (B_TM). Although encouraged, academic research was not written into staff regulations and policies (e.g. it did not account for any proportion of a lecturer's performance evaluation), neither was there any training programmes nor collaborative projects. This was because the committee members were 'swept away in daily operations' (ibid.) and research was mostly 'alien, fanciful' (B_L1_EC) and beyond the ability of most staff (B_MM_EC). Consequently, research was isolated to a few capable and enthusiastic individuals such as B_L1_EC or the VC herself:

> *Forming international research collaborations was my idea. Everyone said it was impossible, so I myself went and form one with a few colleagues in Canada and France to make a point.* (B_TM)

The situation changed dramatically in 2013, when B_MM_EC was recruited as dean of *Economics and Commerce* (EC). This section will present what he did to push research, especially in EC (4.3.1, 4.3.2), followed by the reception of EC lecturers (4.3.3, 4.3.4). Towards the end I will briefly mention the efforts of another dean to push research in *Language and Culture* (LC) (4.3.5).

### 4.3.1. Going beyond the faculty

Prior to *Blue*, B_MM_EC was a high ranking academic staff of a multi-nationally founded and governed higher education institution in Thailand, where he had also done his PhD. It was the VC herself who recruited him and made sure he was very well-informed of *Blue* and *EC* before he made a decision. To this end, the VC gave him *Blue's* corporate strategy and charter, while the to-be dean looked up information about *Blue* on the internet and made enquiries to the VC. Furthermore, the VC introduced him to *EC* as a 'candidate dean' so that he could 'work with full responsibilities of a dean while getting to know the faculty' (B_TM). According to the VC, his biggest responsibility, as well as that of any *Blue* deans, was to drive the five component strategies forward: 'I hire deans to develop the faculties, not operate them. Operation is the responsibility of deputy deans […] [*EC* dean] perfectly understood

this.' Thus, B_MM_EC had to make sense of his future role if he were to accept the post, and for this purpose he took full advantage of the wealth of information he was given and the candidacy.

What struck him was the lack of research activity and capacity among *EC* staff. The dean was a strong believer in research and considered it essential to the identity of any universities and thus lecturers; he said without it lecturers were mere 'teaching mechanics [who] recite[d] the textbooks' (B_MM_EC). Furthermore, he saw that research was a component strategy and understood its central role in *Blue's* vision of becoming a 'normal' university. Thus, he wanted to build a research culture where lecturers made research as part of their identity.

Eventually he decided to return to Vietnam and took up the post, and research was high on his priorities:

> *Before he officially he started he came to me and said academic research was way beyond what the staff were capable of. He proposed to only focus on building research capacity for staff during his first term.* (B_TM)

Starting his position, the dean focused most of his effort on strategic initiatives that promoted research at *Blue*, while daily operations *in* EC were handled by the incumbent deputy dean. These initiatives include *Blue Research Seminar* and a new contractual scheme for researchers, accompanied by a new performance evaluation process:

- *Blue Research Seminar* was a series of 15 weekly training workshops per academic year in research methodology. In each workshop, B_MM_EC himself taught research methodology for the first half, and the rest was a seminar on a paper or research project, the speaker for which was selected and invited by the dean and could be internal or external to *Blue*; for instance, one speaker was a friend of his working in France (B_CV). Attendance was free and open to all lecturers from *Blue* and even outsiders. All workshops were conducted in English.
- A new contractual scheme (B_D) introduced the position of *research-lecturer* and changed the existing title of lecturer to *teaching-lecturer*. Previously all lecturers had had to teach approximately 350 hours per academic year with service duties on top, consequently putting a great constraint on those who wished to do research. The new position reduced this teaching quota by 40% to around 210 hours. In return, *research lecturers* had to (a) participate in at least one research project leading to publications and show evidence of progress throughout and (b) be an active contributor to *Blue Research Seminar* via attendance or presentation when possible. Any lecturers could apply for the new position in a given academic year or conversely opt out of it.
- The new scheme also revamped how performance was evaluated. While *teaching lecturers* had 60% of their performance assessed based on teaching and 15% on research and professional development, which included research capacity building, the figures for *research lecturers* were 40% and 35% respectively. The remaining 25% for both was service to *Blue*. Equally important was the change in the performance

evaluation process. B_MM_EC found the existing one by the *Human Resources Office* ineffective and 'boring', so he designed a new three-step process 'modelled after' that used by his former institution in Thailand. Besides supporting the new contractual scheme, this process sought to improve evaluation accuracy, transparency and accountability.

The three initiatives were special in two ways. First, they were never meant for *EC* alone. B_MM_EC emphasised during his interview that he always tried to get his initiatives implemented institution-wide:

> *To be honest, although my title was dean, I never thought my responsibilities stayed within EC. Blue Research Seminar and everything else was for the institution.* (B_MM_EC)

This was because he held strong ownership of *Blue's* strategic development, saying that 'its vision is my vision', and this was felt and appreciated by the VC (B_TM). *EC* to him was like the 'seed and incubator' that provided the necessary human resources and also became ground zero for his initiatives. At the time of data collection, the first was implemented institution-wide while the others were mostly confined to *EC* and the faculty of *Language and Culture* (LC).

Second, the initiatives constituted dramatic change and even disruption. *Blue Research Seminar* and the *research-lecturer* title transformed research from a fringe, if not non-existent activity into a career consideration for many lecturers in *EC*. The accompanying revamped performance evaluation process pushed research even further, to such an extent that it was considered disruptive to *Blue's* human resources operations:

> *When I described it to the central administration, the Human Resources Office objected in no time. I remember it was a meeting for deans and heads of office. The HR people said everyone had been doing evaluation the same way, why would EC deviate.* […] *They invited me to stay on to defend the idea, but it was more like a quarrel.* (B_MM_EC)

Due to the scope and transformative nature of his initiatives, B_MM_EC had to communicate and convince a lot of stakeholders at multiple levels of hierarchy, including first of all *EC* lecturers and, as seen in the quote above, the *Human Resources Office*. The dean met this challenge with his own distinct way – via informal communication. This will be the focused on the next section.

### 4.3.2. Formal results from informal communication

B_MM_EC's initiatives were accompanied by a lot of informal communication to stakeholders at multiple levels of hierarchy. Within *EC*, the dean often shared with the academic staff how he had been acclimatised to academia back in Thailand and come to appreciate his responsibilities as a university lecturer. The crux of his stories was a period when the he was almost dismissed due to lack of publications:

> *When I transferred from industrial engineering to the newly opened business school, I could not continue my research because nobody shared my specialisation in maths. After some time I was told my contract would be renewed for only a year, during which I must get some publications out or face dismissal.* (B_MM_EC)

The dean was able to keep his job, but this 'crisis' left such a lasting impact that it 'made' him who he was professionally (B_MM_EC). He wanted the academic staff at *EC* to understand as he had that if they wanted to be a university lecturer the pressure was on them to do research and publish, and he found the best way to achieve this was through story telling:

> *I often told my lecturers I wanted to share with them my experiences. If you are to understand the responsibilities of a university lecturer, you have to go through the crises I have been through. If you can overcome them you will mature. If not all you do is recite the textbooks; you are teaching mechanics not lecturers.* (B_MM_EC)

He followed up his stories with reminders that *EC* lecturers should do research or they would eventually find themselves out of the academic job market. Reminders were also given to heads of department during performance evaluation in the hope that they would reinforce the notion of research being part of performance in their department. Most of the time these were made informally and opportunistically through personal, verbal communication; the dean emphasised that he 'hate[d] formality' (B_MM_EC), so he tended not to put messages down onto statements.

Informality extended to how the dean communicated upwards with top management. A good example is how he discovered academic research was a strategic area, or component strategy. Even though the dean was given the corporate strategy at the start of his candidacy, he did not recognise the document when showed in the interview. However, he remembered the content and explained that he did not like reading documents and rarely paid attention to which said what:

> *I am the kind of person who loves informal communication. I dislike it whenever I have to sit down and read something official. I read all the stuff you just mentioned, but I did not care whether this paragraph belonged to this document that document.* (B_MM_EC)

In fact, he said his grasp of the whole corporate strategy mainly came from his many conversations with the VC before and after the candidacy, while official documents stood in the background as evidence for what had been said.

Lateral communication was perhaps where B_MM_EC's preference for informality shined. *Blue's* main campus, an urban tower in Saigon's central district, was on the small size, so deans and heads of department from all faculties had to sit in the same office. Such shared working space was inconvenient because 'everybody could hear everybody' (B_MM_EC). At the same time, however, it enabled interfaculty interactions on a daily basis. It was during small talks that *LC's* dean[20] decided to adopt B_MM_EC's research lecturer scheme:

> *We discussed things in meetings, but we also discussed things everyday*. […] *She and I sat across each other, so we talked all the time and she knew what I did in EC. She ended up taking up the new scheme and evaluation process*. (B_MM_EC)

Later on *Blue* managed to arrange separate offices for the faculties, but ironically deans and heads of department wanted to stay put because it was 'more fun' being together and sometimes having the venue to easily share information could 'get things done' (B_MM_EC). That said, B_MM_EC understood some faculties could not adopt his ideas due to disciplinary features:

> *Sometimes we faculties cannot have the same policies, for example Technology cannot evaluate lecturers the same way since their research has particularities, but I made sure to communicate the principles to them. In the end LC adopted what I was doing in EC*. (B_MM_EC)

Nonetheless, B_MM_EC could conduct formal communication when necessary. One example was when, recall in the last section, he had to defend his *research-lecturer* contract and the revamped performance evaluation in front of the *Human Resources Office*. He had to invoke his rights as a dean to do so and more importantly argued the process was perfectly 'in line with *Blue's* vision' (B_MM_EC). Other formal communication included official announcements and guidelines of the new contractual scheme, or weekly invitation emails to *Blue Research Seminar*.

While B_MM_EC's communication played an extremely important role in realising his initiatives, the support from top management should not be understated. As a whole, deans at *Blue* were enabled and encouraged to be strategic drivers, and the VC was receptive and often decided to endorse their ideas after only a conversation. In the case of B_MM_EC, she was instrumental in getting his new contractual scheme and performance evaluation accepted by the *Human Resources Office*: 'She also stayed on and participated in the heated discussion. She was totally for my idea and told them to let me implement the process.'

[20] B_MM_LC, who was a participant in this study, is the dean of *LC* from 2012-2015. The *LC* dean mentioned in this instance was B_MM_LC's successor.

(B_MM_EC). The VC's vocal support enabled B_MM_EC to proceed with the scheme in *EC* and later on introduce it to other faculties.

Up to this point B_MM_EC's initiatives appeared successful as he was able to communicate them both within and outside *EC*, gaining support from various stakeholders. However, interviews with *EC* lecturers revealed at the grassroots level, the initiatives and more generally research were problematic.

### 4.3.3. Personal utility and resistance

Outside *EC*, the dean exerted little influence on lecturers' perception towards research apart from their awareness of *Blue Research Seminar* and of the *research-lecturer* contract being introduced in *EC* and *LC*. This is understandable since the span of his power was limited to *EC*, and he 'respected faculty autonomy' (B_MM_EC). For this reason, in this section and the next I will focus on *EC* lecturers given they were the most involved.

One thing I wish to note is that *EC* lecturers had no awareness of the *Research* strategy, or *Blue's* corporate strategy as a whole. Indeed, they were not involved in institutional decision making, so they never cared about strategic matters as it was not part of the job, neither did they have access to strategic information (B_L3_EC), and they trusted that top management would know best (B_L1_EC). Thus, what they said about research and B_MM_EC's three initiatives came from the dean's communication and their own engagement in the initiatives, mostly *Blue Research Seminar*. On top of this, it appeared research was not an outstanding area of activity that they were concerned about: 'It is one thing among many things, some [being] more important like teaching' (B_L3_EC). As shall be seen below, they laid research against teaching and other matters like livelihood, through which research was understood.

With that said, B_MM_EC's efforts to convey the necessity of research were effective with *EC* lecturers. To start with, the majority of *EC* lecturers were rather young at under 40 with strong industry background (B_TM), for instance B_L2_EC and B_L3_EC used to work as managers for a multi-national companies. All held a master's degree, but only a few had done a doctoral study or had any research experience. Thus, the dean's insistence on a lecturer having to do research came as a shock:

> *He put forward great pressure: the survival of a lecturer without research. Even though we are not required to do research or publish yet, the vision that we will become redundant is daunting. It is like an axe hanging above your head, chronic anxiety. I now have to think about doing a PhD to keep my job.*
> (B_L3_EC)

It seemed the dean's messages achieved the intended impact of making lecturers understand and feel the pressure that research was part of their work, and in so doing invoked anxious reaction. Some, like B_L3_EC, responded by considering a PhD to safeguard their career. In one of the *Blue Research Seminars* I attended, one *EC* lecturer and another from *LC* shared that they were both looking for a research topic for a doctoral study (B_CV). B_L2_EC in particular also felt the pressure but reacted more lightly due to her personal connections outside *Blue* from whom she learned that a doctorate degree was increasingly a requirement in major public universities:

> *I was told that the Ministry of Education will require all lecturers to have a doctorate degree. I have yet to verify this but I know that for a while the big names have been recruiting only people with PhDs* […] *I have to catch up sooner or later.* (B_L2_EC)

Nevertheless, *EC* lecturers faced a lot of ambiguity whether and how they went about research. First and foremost, they looked at research not as a separate matter but as an area of activity within their job at *Blue* and even more generally their livelihood. Thus, it was not research or B_MM_EC's initiatives *per se* that they talked about in the interviews, but rather they discussed their own job and livelihood, of which research had suddenly become a part. This was evident in the accounts of all *EC* lecturers in this study: For one, B_L1_EC was the most active researcher of the faculty with a healthy track record of publications and grants within and outside Vietnam; she was one of the very few *EC* lecturers who held a PhD and opted for the new *research-lecturer* position, and had established a research group on foreign trade and investment in *EC*. When asked about research at *Blue*, the participant commented that despite efforts to write research into policies and regulations, most notably the new contractual scheme, there was nothing to enforce it: 'This is a management issue. Carrot for research is extremely limited, not to mention there is no stick.' (B_L1_EC). B_L2_EC elaborated on this:

> *Research has been rarely mentioned during performance evaluation, and besides 60% teaching you have this 40% indistinct mix of research and service that you could wholly devote to the latter* […] *To be honest, the whole process has yet to provide motivation for any of us; we don't know how or whether we get promoted or our benefits next year will be better if we perform well.* (B_L2_EC)

B_L2_EC's accounts showed that in her department the new performance evaluation was not implemented as intended since research/professional development and service were mixed up instead of the respective 15% and 25% allocation (performance evaluation was described in 4.3.1). Unfortunately, her head of department was beyond reach to comment on why this was so, but the more important matter was B_L2_EC and other lecturers did not see concrete feedback from line managers for their research performance, leading to ambiguity.

When asked how she kept the enthusiasm alive in the absence of carrots and sticks, B_L1_EC admitted:

> *Cannot blame the lecturers you know. They are ordinary people with family and kids, and I'm no exception. But because my livelihood is fine, I can follow the academic calling* [...] *That's why this is a management issue and not just of this university; you have no carrot you cannot tell people to do research even when it is a good thing. Lecturers always do what is in their best interests to maximise personal utility.* (B_L1_EC)

She made a strong link between the personal and academic sphere in that livelihood was the prerequisite for doing research. This also meant she made sense of research not only with experiences on campus but also those from her personal life. Moreover, her remarks suggested *EC* lecturers saw their own job and everything in it, including research, from a utilitarian stance; that is, the lecturers were driven by their own needs and interests rather than the inherent value of an activity (research in this case). Though not a *research-lecturer*, B_L2_EC was active in research and a member of B_L1_EC's research group; she also referred to stable livelihood but said that unlike her colleague she could not 'get the feel for research'. She observed that few lecturers at *EC* and *Blue* would 'volunteer' to do research because 'there [was] little to gain personally'; as a result, most focused on teaching which 'brought clear financial benefits' (B_L2_EC). Her response reinforced the notion that lecturers were utilitarian.

B_L1_EC and B_L2_EC, however, were nowhere as candid as B_L3_EC with regards to livelihood and research. Doing no research, B_L3_EC devoted all her time to teaching and even registered for more classes than required in order to earn overtime wage, and despite her support for B_MM_EC and his initiatives, she felt that there was no place for research:

> *The wage to begin with is just enough to go by. What if we have two or three kids? We cannot even comfortably raise them with it. Teaching is our bread; if we cannot fill the quota, come in class late, leave early, get complained by students, that's the end. And there's always so much to do. What about research? No clear support from the institution, and if you want in on the new scheme* [to have teaching hours cut and get paid for research]*, you need to have good output as proof upfront, and how to get that output? Sacrifice teaching hours and starve. And what if we fail? Few can do research. Too risky, too adventurous!*
>
> *I sincerely wanted to support him, but we lecturers have to take care of ourselves first. We cannot just go and contribute to mankind; that is very unrealistic. Although the dean tried hard to promote research, we saw no motivation.* (B_L3_EC)

Not only did her comments emphasise livelihood and utility as the basis on which lecturers made career decisions, they illuminated why *EC* lecturers felt uncertain about research besides the lack of enforcement and incentives as mentioned by B_L1_EC and B_L2_EC. That is, despite the new contractual scheme *Blue* had no mechanism to help inexperienced researchers transition from teaching to research if they wanted to. Such transition was thus

perceived as too risky because it required *EC* lecturers to accept a substantial opportunity cost in the form of teaching wage when they gave up teaching hours to do research. The cost was made greater by the absence of upfront financial backing for the transition and by the possible failure to qualify for the new title. Simply put, lecturers were put in an ambiguous, all-or-nothing situation, to which their response was to prioritise own interests.

Overall, interviews with *EC* lecturers showed that despite B_MM_EC's efforts to implement his initiatives and to communicate the necessity of research, ultimately they failed to create a research culture owing to a lack of enforcement, incentives and support system.

### 4.3.4. Adverse conditions and leadership

The ambiguity described above was compounded by the low research capacity of *EC* lecturers. B_L3_EC thought that the transition to the *research-lecturer* contract would not have been such an issue if *EC* lecturers possessed the necessary knowledge and skills to do research. Employed at *Blue* for over 10 years, B_L1_EC provided a historical perspective on why so few lecturers possessed research capacity:

> *We grew extremely fast; 25 years is extremely short to go from a vocational school to a college to a university. And we carried over many of our pre-university staff. I do not want to point fingers but there is a considerable gap between those who are and are not capable of being a university lecturer. They should adapt of course, but we cannot just throw them out if they refuse to, because research is not in their contract in the first place.* (B_L1_EC)

B_L2_EC added that *Blue* still had 'a teaching culture' around which recruitment and promotion revolved, so lecturers cared more about 'improving student feedback than learning how to do research'. Both responses showed how *Blue's* existing strategic patterns, which was heavily teaching-oriented, became obstacles for its *Research* strategy. This issue was also raised by the VC (B_TM) and B_MM_EC during their interviews. As a consequence, the carried over staff from *Blue's* past and even most of the new, younger staff had little research capacity. To further complicate matters, the few that wanted to try research 'did not know where to start' (B_L2_EC). Given she had no research experience, B_L3_EC was asked what she thought about B_MM_EC's *Blue Research Seminar*, which she 'used to attend' (B_L3_EC), and its impact on her research capacity. The participant was ambivalent at first but quickly went into detail about the problems:

> *The training gave a clear overview of research. Personally I could not learn that much but some did. Well, what can I say, there were a lot of problems with how it was organised. I was unable to take on Thursday classes for a whole semester. I would not mind if the time spent had been productive, but the first few workshops were a drag. Many lecturers knew nothing! He had to go over the basics – what a research question was, what was quantitative and qualitative*

> *design, all of which I had learned from my Master's. I found it annoying, imagine somebody forcing you to learn spelling again. When he moved on to the good stuff, another issue arose: English. The research lessons were difficult, too much new knowledge crammed in an hour and a half.* […] *Blue Research Seminar was beyond us.* (B_L3_EC)

Language and unfamiliarity with research apparently formed a significant barrier to *EC* lecturers' engagement in *Blue Research Seminar*, thus hindering the development of their research capacity. B_L3_EC added that some presentations by guest speakers were 'even worse' because they required knowledge of not only research methodology but also discipline-specific topics: 'How can an average business lecturer understand a mathematical study in econometrics?' According to B_MM_EC, however, the presentations were not aimed at teaching research methodology but providing opportunities for attendees to widen their knowledge and network with seasoned researchers. Nonetheless, the sense of learning little led to B_L3_EC's withdrawal behaviour:

> *I took out my laptop and worked; a few others did too. I was lost what I was doing there. Suddenly realised I went because of him. Many of us went because of him, not to let him down, to make him happy, because he was a good dean and scholar.* (B_L3_EC)

It was interesting that while this lecturer had been very vocal about personal utility, she considered the dean a bigger motivation to keep attending *Blue Research Seminar*. Indeed, she 'sincerely wanted to support [the dean]' but could not (B_L3_EC). Therefore, there was a strong leadership dimension in her reception of the B_MM_EC's strategic initiatives. That said, the participant eventually quit and decided if she were to do research she 'would be better off staying home and self study' (ibid.).

I attended six workshops of the 16/17 academic year's series (B_CV), two of which were held by *EC* research lecturers after B_MM_EC left *Blue*; I was also asked to present about qualitative methodology in one of them. When the dean was organising the seminars, there were 15 to 20 lecturers from *EC* and *LC* regularly attending, along with three from other universities. After his dismissal, however, fewer than 10 would turn up. This drop in attendance corroborated B_L3_EC's accounts, in that lecturers attended *Blue Research Seminar* and more generally tried to do research only because of B_MM_EC, who provided instrumental yet singular leadership in driving *Blue's Research* strategy against its 'teaching culture' (B_L2_EC). In a later interview, B_L2_EC said she no longer considered a PhD 'in the foreseeable future' and had retired from a collaborative project with B_L1_EC, leaving the latter with 'all the writing'. In another instance, a regular attendee of *Blue Research Seminar* also decided to hold off pursuing a doctoral study after the dean left (B_CV). Both lecturers cited too much teaching, and B_L2_EC also referred to the uncertainty over the role of research and a doctoral degree in her job. Two weeks prior to writing this chapter, I had a

meeting with B_L1_EC, who lamented: 'I miss *Blue Research Seminar*, but there was no way to keep research alive, not without him at the helm and not with the new management[21] reversing his efforts'. This showed that the absence of B_MM_EC, though possibly the most fundamental, was not the only organisational change that impaired *Blue's Research* strategy – there was also the new executive.

Personally B_L1_EC tried to 'save the flame' by gathering a few dedicated young researchers into an informal group: 'I don't know if anything comes out of it, but we can just meet sometimes to have an intellectual conversation.' She was still working on the collaborative project that B_L2_EC left and despite the new executive's heavily teaching-oriented corporate strategy, she was committed to research as it was her 'passion and belief', and she had 'the means [to]'. It should be noted that, rather amazingly, B_L1_EC's research had always been her personal work, funded externally and not by *Blue* in any manner even when B_MM_EC was dean, but due to her affiliation with the university her publications inadvertently contributed to its research output and therefore strategy.

### 4.3.5. An alternative in another faculty

Though not a priority, research was also a concern for the dean of *Language and Culture* (B_MM_LC), and like his counterpart in *EC*, he found that the focus should be capacity building for staff. His approach, however, was different and could be said to be more context-sensitive. Aware that few could do research, he decided to first expose lecturers to relevant scholarship in the hope that they could acquire the latest subject-matter knowledge and have an overview of research methodology. Therefore, he organised trips to conferences for *LC* lecturers which doubled as their vacation, and these conferences were in nearby Southeast Asian countries to cut down expenses so that as many staff as possible could benefit from them:

> *To be a good researcher you must first be a good learner. The best way* [for my lecturers] *to learn was to send them to conferences. I myself travel all the time and have attended numerous conferences* […] *I have organised a lot of conference trips for the faculty, and these were also their vacation, and I went with them. We chose cheap Southeast and East Asian countries to get many people on board.* (B_MM_LC)

Additionally, he encouraged staff to seek out conferences themselves; he even accompanied them to some. *LC* lecturers were appreciative of conference opportunities and more generally of B_MM_LC's management style, as expressed by one of them:

> *I like him a lot. He is a caring and competent manager* […] *The trips were fun, first of all, but we also took away new knowledge and felt motivated to have*

[21] She was referring to the new top management that was installed after the ownership dispute (refer back to 3.4.2).

*something to present at future conferences*. (personal communication, this *LC* lecturer was not one of the participants)

Nevertheless, there was little data on research in *LC*, partly because B_MM_LC only stayed in the post for two years (before moving to another) and his successor seemingly did not maintain his conference trips. This was not to mention the successor was dismissed a short time after starting the post due to the ownership dispute (see 3.4.2). With all that said, it could be seen that B_MM_LC and B_MM_EC's approaches to pushing *Blue's Research* strategy reflected them personally. B_MM_EC placed much more emphasis on research, hence the comprehensiveness and intensity of his initiatives; as an academic. By contrast, B_MM_LC took research more lightly and, as a traveller, combined research with vacation for his staff.

## 4.4. Plagiarism and *Turnitin*: Changing mindset or counting numbers

Apart from academic research, *Blue's* vision of being a normal university included teaching and learning quality of 'international standards' (B_D), so that scholars and students from all around the world would feel 'right at home' (B_TM). A major strategic issue in this regard was academic integrity, which was explicitly stated in *Blue's* core values and motto (refer back to 4.2.1).

Academic integrity was enforced with regulations on academic dishonesty and guidelines on handling of offences (B_D), plus an invigilation process that all participants described as very strict. It was further promoted by two strategic initiatives: One was a movement represented by a students' club that advocated for education ethics. The other was the purchase and implementation of *Turnitin*[22] to prevent plagiarism. I will focus on the latter in this section as it had much more impact, affecting all students and lecturers. More specifically, this section will first describe how the purchase of *Turnitin* came about and its loose relations with the students' club (4.4.1). Then, I will report how *Turnitin* and the anti-plagiarism goal behind it was made sense of by students (4.4.2, 4.4.3) and lecturers (4.4.3).

### 4.4.1. Going beyond the institution

Unlike B_MM_EC, B_MM_LC did not join *Blue* as a faculty dean, nor was he headhunted. Instead, he applied for the post of director of *Blue's General Education* and worked for a year before becoming *LC's* dean in 2012. While he did not possess the same level of strategic understanding and management skills as B_MM_EC (B_TM), B_MM_LC was also convinced of *Blue's* vision and held it as his own:

[22] Turnitin is a plagiarism-checking software and service, see https://www.turnitin.com/

> *Blue was not doing anything grandiose; we just wanted to be a real university. I saw in it the values of a university as a university should be* […] *That said, when I joined, there were lots of things were in dire need of fixing, and I got straight to work.* (B_MM_LC)

Like B_MM_EC, he also had to make sense of his role as someone tasked with pushing *Blue's* five component strategies forward, and to him driving the strategies in *LC* meant fixing its existing problems, as stated in the excerpt above.

One of the first things B_MM_LC wanted to fix was plagiarism. The dean found plagiarism 'a rampant issue in Vietnam [and] a disease' and that little was done about it for a long time. Therefore, he 'made it a point' to combat all forms of cheating at *Blue*, particularly plagiarism, and the first step was to raise awareness of it and also to teach it properly. He also recounted that his awareness and objection to plagiarism was formed when he did a PhD in the US:

> *My programme opened my eyes to the values of a university, like academic autonomy and integrity* […] *Until my PhD I had never really understood what plagiarism was and the significance of acknowledging prior research* […] *Fighting plagiarism has always been at the centre of my work.* (B_MM_LC)

The dean devised an initiative in the way of an activist students' club whose mission was to run an advocacy movement for 'a clean and honest education'. It was hoped that the movement would help produce honest graduates and in turn reduce corruption in the Vietnamese society in the long run (B_MM_LC). The rationale behind having the initiative led by students was that they would feel 'true ownership' and appreciate academic integrity, instead of having it imposed by 'those with more power' (ibid.). As a side note, the dean's signature management style was that he was very close to and supportive of students (B_MM_LC; B_S1_LC; B_S3_LC). For instance, every week he invited a few students to have lunch with him (he paid for all) to get to know them and hear about recent happenings around campus. That said, the students' club idea received strong support from top management, who were afterwards actively involved in planning its operations. The club was established and started operating in 2013, fully staffed by students with B_MM_LC as chair. It carried out its mission by organising exhibitions, talkshows, conferences and off-campus advocacy tours (e.g. to other universities and public parks), all themed around ethical issues in higher education. Thanks to continuing support from top management, it managed to hold ambitious events engaging not only *Blue's* staff and students but also many people outside the university, including educators, publishers, businesses and celebrities. Their highest-profile event was a conference on academic integrity whose attendees were academic leaders from universities and colleges all over Vietnam. Unfortunately, none of the students participating in this study was part of the club, although they had heard of it and attended its events. They did not deem it relevant to their studies (B_S1_LC) and added that there were a lot of students' clubs on campus (B_S2_EC), so the present one felt obscure to a normal students.

An advocacy movement, nonetheless, was of little help to detect and prevent plagiarism, and therefore the combat against this academic issue necessitated a more operational mechanism. In agreement with B_MM_LC, B_MM_EC deemed something had to be done about plagiarism, but his efforts were directed towards finding a plagiarism-checking software: 'There is too much plagiarism in Vietnam, but we do not have a tool to stop it. I was looking for a software to scan plagiarised texts.' He began by talking to the university librarian about the idea and discovered that *Turnitin*, a famous company in plagiarism-checking software, had actually contacted *Blue* before to advertise their product. This led him to contact *Turnitin* to enquire whether their software could scan Vietnamese texts, the response to which was that he would be given a trial. The dean successfully tested the software in *EC* and later proposed to top management about purchasing it for *Blue*, which was quickly accepted since the request not only coincided with ongoing activities by B_MM_LC's students' club but also provided a tool to realise and consolidate the ongoing anti-plagiarism movement. The library was then responsible for training lecturers and students about plagiarism, citation and *Turnitin* usage. It was interesting to see the similarity between B_MM_EC's *Turnitin* initiative and his research initiatives (4.3.1): They all started in *EC* but were meant for *Blue* and involved informal communication (with the librarian in this case). Unlike research, however, *Turnitin* was made compulsory for all faculties because anti-plagiarism was more feasible and pressing for *Blue's* teaching-centric environment (B_TM). In addition, while the research initiatives were aimed at lecturers (i.e. there were no plans for postgraduate research), only students' works were scanned by *Turnitin*.

The most special aspect of the *Turnitin* initiative was that its impact went far beyond *Blue*. Not only was *Blue* the first Vietnamese university to purchase a plagiarism-checking service, top management decided to disseminate this practice to the whole higher education sector. For a start, B_MM_EC managed to negotiate a discount with *Turnitin* by, on *Blue's* behalf, offering to become their country agent. Concurrent to this, *Blue* invited representatives from the *Ministry of Education and Training* and a few universities for demonstration. *Turnitin* was well-received and adopted by the attending universities, and the *Ministry* even promised to recommend the software to other universities. Two weeks later a much larger demonstration, this time presented by *Turnitin* themselves, was held at *Blue* with the audience comprising major public universities and publishers, and in the end the software became one of, if not the most popular plagiarism checker in Vietnam. Thus, the *Turnitin* initiative clearly demonstrated the high level of support from *Blue's* top management for strategic initiatives by deans, highlighting the latter's strategic driving role.

With that said, *Turnitin* brought about significant development in *Blue's* teaching and learning, particularly assessment. From 2013, regulations on academic dishonestly (B_D) were updated to give more focus on plagiarism, and it was required that all major written pieces (mainly internship reports and the dissertation) be submitted by students to *Turnitin* and

then checked by lecturers, and that plagiarism had to stay below 20% – note this threshold as it will be often referred to onwards. All students and lecturers had to attend the library's training, and lecturers were asked to remind students about plagiarism and provide guidance with *Turnitin* usage. More important than this workflow expansion, it was expected that students and lecturers would become aware of plagiarism and change their mindset away from 'indiscriminately copy[ing] existing information' (B_MM_EC). Interviews with the students, however, showed this educational goal was still far-fetched.

### 4.4.2. Change in behaviours, not mindset

One of the questions posed with *Blue* students in this study was 'What comes to mind when you hear plagiarism?', and their response was unanimously '*Turnitin*', with B_S1_EC even referring to the software as among the three things she remembered the most about *Blue*. When asked why this was so, the participants again gave rather similar answers:

> *Only we have it. A friend of mine from the University of Economics once borrowed my* [*Turnitin*] *account to check her works, but just for fun. They did not have it there.* (B_S3_EC)

> *No one did it before us. In other universities they copy one another or stuff from the internet like crazy, and in some cases you can buy high grades. Here lecturers' corruption is none, and you have to write your own papers.* (B_S1_LC)

The software appeared to leave a lasting impact on students' perception of their programme, but interestingly the reason was not its anti-plagiarism function but that it made *Blue* unique. Furthermore, none was aware of *Turnitin* as a strategic initiative, even though it was a major one for *Blue* and actually happened during their undergraduate years at the university. To them, *Turnitin* was 'just there' and was another aspect of their programmes to deal with (B_S2_LC). In fact, the students did not care about any strategic matters: 'What do you mean by strategy? We are only students.' (B_S3_EC), and as a side note only a few remembered academic integrity was a core value of *Blue* 'from the VC's speeches' (B_S2_EC). Therefore, what they though about *Turnitin* and more generally plagiarism was simply informed by their use of the software and any ensuing feedback from lecturers about plagiarised texts in their papers; this will be evident below.

While all found *Turnitin* a memorable part of their studies, their perception of its impact was mixed. On the one hand, some said *Turnitin* compelled them to improve their assignments:

> *Turnitin is good because in other universities students take bits and pieces here and there and patch them into their own report; they do not even change the font! At Blue some reports are very professional-looking.* (B_S1_EC)

> *It makes you use your brain. You have to write your own papers, so you need to know what you are writing, and you do learn something about the subject.* (B_S2_EC)

> *Since you are writing your own works, you feel responsible for making them better.* (B_S3_LC)

Improvements ranged from presentation to content, and in several cases students' own learning and work ethics were also developed. The participants mentioned, however, that prior to *Turnitin* they had already been required by lecturers to pay attention to the quality of their assignments and understand what they had written, especially for the dissertation: 'Lecturers here are not the kind who tell students write anything to lengthen their papers' (B_S4_EC). This implied what *Turnitin* really seemed to do was less helping students improve their assignments, as they suggested, but more helping them better themselves as learners.

On the other hand, some complained:

> *The software is very sensitive, too sensitive. You are often identified as plagiarising trivial things like 'for this reason', 'solutions include'.* (B_S3_EC)

> *It is stupid. A lot of stuff picked up is unwarranted, you know, phrases you cannot avoid using or even Blue's logo and motto!* (B_S2_LC)

The complaints were technical in nature and mostly about being unduly faulted by *Turnitin*. Similar complaints were found on *Blue Confession*, a Facebook community (see 3.5.8) created and managed by *Blue* students for *Blue* students; one such post read:

> *I am very frustrated with the software Turnitin. Cannot understand why everything is marked plagiarised, why is 'thank you sincerely', 'professional work environment', 'Blue' plagiarism?* (B_SM)

Thus, the technical issue of *Turnitin's* sensitivity appeared fairly common. Fortunately, it only caused 'inconvenience' (B_S3_LC) since lecturers had the discretion to remove inappropriate detections by *Turnitin* during marking, thereby reducing the plagiarised percentage below the 20% threshold. On the surface this was fair for students, but some lecturers could have abused their rights and removed accurate detections (this did happen, to be elaborated in 4.4.3). That said, beyond inconvenience *Turnitin's* sensitivity had the potential to negatively affect learning, as raised by a student:

> *Sometimes I do not want to touch any literature and just write what I think. Once I have read a certain author I will be influenced and whatever I write will look like the original text. But this means I cannot go deep or wide with my assignments without getting strikes from Turnitin.* (B_S2_LC)

B_S2_LC faced a paradox in which the more she read and cited the literature, the more likely she would run into trouble with *Turnitin*. A few posts on *Blue Confession* echoed her sentiment, with one questioning how plagiarism could be avoided when the literature kept expanding (B_SM). B_S2_LC student added that she was afraid of 'misrepresenting the original author' if she paraphrased the source material too much. These findings indicated that some students lacked academic writing capabilities, particularly paraphrasing, which was not perceived a problem by itself but when combined with *Turnitin*'s sensitivity caused them

to shy away from the literature. This was clearly an unintended outcome that might not have been foreseen by B_MM_EC and top management.

Be it praise or complaint, what students discussed was limited to behavioural change. That they hardly mentioned anything cognitive or attitudinal (e.g. how they understood and felt about plagiarism) begged the question whether the *Turnitin* initiative had achieved the intended change in mindset away from 'indiscriminately copy[ing] existing information' (B_MM_EC), as laid out by B_MM_EC and B_MM_LC. When explicitly asked what they were taught by *Blue* library about *Turnitin* and plagiarism, the students responded that they understood plagiarism as copying others' ideas word-for-word without citing and that this was a 'bad thing' to do (B_S1_EC; B_S4_EC; B_S1_LC; B_S3_LC). Some, however, questioned the necessity of paraphrasing:

> *We know that plagiarism is bad, but sometimes I cannot help wondering why certain stuff cannot be copied whole, like facts on a company's website 'Established in 2001, company ABC is a leader in household goods'. Paraphrasing or citing this sentence does not feel necessary.* (B_S2_EC)

> *Paraphrasing is a waste of time. I cannot quite get why I have to think up another way to express the author's ideas when I can spend my time progressing with my work, why can't I just take the original text and cite the source?* (B_S2_LC)

Such misgivings demonstrated students' discomfort and incomplete grasp of plagiarism and more generally academic writing. This issue was also found in interviews with lecturers, some of whom remarked that students' understanding of plagiarism and observance greatly varied. The lecturers referred to cases where students used existing information, especially from the internet, in a 'too liberal' (B_L1_LC) manner with no citation, as if they had not considered such act plagiarism. It thus appeared that the *Turnitin* initiative could not achieve its goal of mindset change.

During the member-checking interview with B_MM_EC at the end of this study, he gave a lengthy comment on findings concerning *Turnitin* and students' limited mindset shift:

> *It is not surprising really. None have been taught about plagiarism at school, neither have their lecturers been except those who did a degree at good universities abroad. The idea of plagiarism is still pretty alien in Vietnamese education, not just the higher education sector. You see people plagiarise all the time; a very common practice is quoting a statement without proper citation, usually the author's name being mentioned and nothing else. You cannot easily change a mindset years in the making and reinforced by the environment.* (B_MM_EC)

What he said showed friction between the intended shift in students' mindset and the larger social context where it was formed; similar remarks were actually made by lecturers (B_L3_EC; B_L2_LC). The dean added that a few training workshops by the library were not enough, and plagiarism had to be a focus throughout a programme. Interestingly, interviews with students and lecturers suggested the workshops themselves might have contributed to the limited attitudinal impact of this initiative: According to both students and lecturers, the workshops were to demonstrate the usage of *Turnitin* and how citation should be done, thus being mostly technical (B_L3_EC; B_L2_LC; B_S4_EC; B_S1_LC). In addition, the students recounted lecturers said little about plagiarism, neither did they provide feedback on plagiarised sentences if a paper did not cross the 20% threshold (B_S3_EC; B_S2_LC). It was possibly because of this emphasis on technicality within *Blue*, plus the low awareness of plagiarism in the larger Vietnamese context, that the initiative was limited in effect. More severely, anti-plagiarism at *Blue* turned into a counting exercise.

### 4.4.3. Counting numbers, abuse and politics

Although students felt the pressure of having to write their own sentences, they did so only to the extent that *Turnitin* detection was kept below 20%:

> *I do pay attention so as not to plagiarise too much but might copy a sentence or two. If Turnitin says 20% or below I leave it at that.* (B_S2_EC)
>
> *When I don't know how to paraphrase I just put a chunk in quotation marks and cite the source. I know my papers might have too much quotation, but my lecturers are usually okay with this.* (B_S3_EC)
>
> *I just write the way I like first. Then I look at what Turnitin says and change a few words[23] here and there until the percentage is below 20%.* (B_S2_LC)

Thus, students' motivation to avoid plagiarism was mainly extrinsic, driven by the consequence of penalty for crossing the threshold, as well as by utility because there was 'no bonus for achieving 0%' (B_S2_LC). Seemingly 'nobody care[d]' (B_S3_EC) about plagiarism if he/she still passed courses and complete a degree. In addition, the students' unfamiliarity with paraphrasing and citation made them feel 'writing properly [was] a chore' (B_S4_EC), so sometimes they neglected citing short phrases as long as the detection result was below 20%. In brief, students seemed to engage in a box ticking exercise around the 20% threshold. The fixation on this percentage was also present among lecturers, but in a more complicated manner.

Before the *Turnitin* initiative, *Blue* lecturers had already been asked to check for plagiarism, and it was up to them to decide whether students had plagiarised. Leaving such task to lecturers' discretion was problematic because understandably they could not know or

[23] When students first submit they will see *Turnitin* result. They are permitted one re-submission to make necessary modificantions, but this time they can no longer see *Turnitin* result.

remember enough literature and media to assess every assignment. This was not to mention a number of lecturers were reportedly unfamiliar with plagiarism and citation in academic writing (B_MM_EC; B_MM_LC; B_L3_EC). This resulted in plagiarism being ignored in almost all assessment (B_MM_LC). The introduction of *Turnitin* turned the situation around, bringing plagiarism to the forefront of *Blue's* teaching. That said, lecturers still played a major role in determining whether plagiarism was being committed. As mentioned in 4.4.2, they ensured that students were marked fairly by undoing inappropriate detections by *Turnitin*; however, this meant they also had the power to remove correct detections and in turn reduce the detection result to any number they saw fit. Such abuse did happen and was explicitly described by one lecturer:

> *There is a group who do not care. They will let you off unless you plagiarise too blatantly, like copy another's dissertation* […] *We can reduce the percentage even to 0% you know, and some really do cover up their students' plagiarism, except when cross-marking is involved, which only takes place for the dissertation*[24]. (B_L3_EC)

She was then asked why this was the case considering *Turnitin* had been in place for three years (by the time of this study) with clear policies and regulations, and that *Blue's* stance towards academic integrity was generally very strict. The participant attributed the problem to low awareness among lecturers:

> *How many truly get plagiarism? To their mind cheating is looking over someone's shoulder in the exam room or copying a classmate's works, not taking stuff from a book or the internet. And how many cite properly themselves, let alone teach others to?* (B_L3_EC)

Her observation corroborated that of B_MM_EC (refer back to 4.4.2) and B_MM_LC, who complained that some lecturers 'had serious misconceptions like it [was] fine if not useful for students to enrich their assignments by copying books and websites'. B_L3_EC added that regulations on plagiarism were not 'strict and thorough' enough as only major written pieces had to be scanned and in some programmes only the dissertation was. As a consequence, plagiarism was 'obscure' and *Turnitin* became 'an afterthought and a mere tool' in any assessment (B_L3_EC). A third cause for *Turnitin* abuse among lecturers was their dependence on student feedback:

> *Again we have to remember what is the bread here: teaching. A lecturer maintains his bread with good students' feedback. There are few* [students] *who manage below 20% and many who will always get caught by Turnitin however many times they revise. What are you supposed to do? Fail them and get terrible feedback? Plus students nowadays are devious; it will go viral 'Oh this*

[24] Dissertations were marked by two examiners: the supervisor and another lecturer. Students then defended their dissertation in front of a panel consisting of three lecturers.

> *lecturer is very difficult, do not ask him for supervision or enrol in his classes'. Then the bosses will start questioning why you have no students* (ibid.)

Similar to the research initiatives in 4.3, it seemed the push against plagiarism faced two immense and intertwined obstacles, namely (a) *Blue's* existing, teaching-oriented strategic patterns that made heavy use of student feedback and (b) lecturers' livelihood which was dependent on that feedback. There is, however, even more risk here because in using *Turnitin* lecturers directly affected students, rather than only themselves as was the case with doing research. The excerpt above showed if lecturers maintained stringent standards they might find themselves at a deadend given how often students plagiarised and subsequently start a chain reaction that endangered their job security. This complication was taken yet a notch higher when a dissertation is marked:

> *Of course as second marker I have to scan the paper independently. But what if Turnitin detection was too high? I cannot just fail the paper, especially not during defense, in front of the supervisor, other lecturers and students. Giving low grades for the content was enough to damage faces, imagine failing a dissertation, and for plagiarism! Do I get an award for it or intense animosity and retaliation against my supervisees? Usually I deduct grades a little for those who went above 20%, but I have to make up reasons related to the content.* (B_L3_EC)

Adherence to academic integrity could greatly strain relations with both students and colleagues, leading to the possibility of retaliation. It was also interesting to see how B_L3_EC avoided interpersonal rifts with supervisors/first markers when cross-marking: She flexibly penalised plagiarism by pointing at the content, and the penalty was never to fail a dissertation. Figuratively speaking, she was treading a fine line between academic integrity and interpersonal harmony. What she said also indicated that the decision to remove correct detections, as mentioned earlier, could very well have been politically motivated.

The issue of *Turnitin* abuse was raised with other lecturers, not all but only those who I had built good rapport with since it was a sensitive matter. They agreed such act was more likely than not among certain lecturers lacking in 'teaching commitment and awareness of plagiarism' (B_L2_EC), but at worst this was confined to a small group, and the situation was not as grim as what B_L3_EC described. For example, lecturers in B_L2_EC's department did 'take the time' to read through *Turnitin* detections and made sure students were assessed fairly. B_L1_EC, in particular, 'trust[ed] everyone to have enough decency to tell their students to revise til the quality [was] acceptable' (B_L1_LC had a similar answer). She was then asked about what was considered 'acceptable' as it was a rather qualitative word for the 20% threshold, and she explained that she would let a paper crossing 20% pass if each detection accounted for 1-2%, which was 'small enough' (ibid.) - again note the qualitative descriptor. As to dissertation marking, some lecturers admitted to often

seeing papers violate the 20% threshold, but there was 'an unspoken rule' (B_L2_EC) to deduct grades instead of failing those papers. Unlike B_L3_EC, however, B_L2_EC said the rule emerged out of necessity due to students' weak academic capacity more than workplace politics. In the end, it appeared that the use of *Turnitin* at *Blue* left a lot of space for human decision, hence qualitative judgement and politics coming into play. Coupled with low awareness of plagiarism, this prevented the *Turnitin* initiative from achieving its goals of mindset change.

Last but not least, I wish to point out that, unlike students, the lecturers were aware of *Turnitin* as a strategic initiative, but only to the extent that they knew when *Blue* bought the software. This was thanks to faculty meetings where the purchase was announced (B_L2_EC; B_L1_LC). Apart from this, their perception of *Turnitin* was informed solely by their experiences using it, as reported above. They were not communicated the rationale or backstory behind the initiative (ibid.), although they themselves acknowledged plagiarism as a problem for Vietnamese students. In addition, *Turnitin* was not something they paid attention to by itself since it was considered as 'part of the job […] to get over with' (B_L3_EC).

### 4.5. Language

'Internationalisation is not Americanisation' (B_TM) was a tenet in *Blue's* internationalisation. However, this was not written into the corporate strategy; indeed, it was not documented anywhere, but rather communicated orally by the VC to deans, lecturers and students at *Blue*. As she explained, *Blue* was to be a multi-cultural university where scholars and students from around the world would 'feel no different than home' (B_TM). Therefore, although the university drew a lot of inspiration from American universities, it should not be wholly modelled after them.

A key issue in promoting multi-culturalism was language. While acknowledging English as the accepted international language, *Blue* believed there was much more to the word 'international' than the Anglophone and definitely than America (B_TM). Therefore, a truly international university should promote multi-lingualism (ibid.), and one way *Blue* accomplished this was to have students learn more than the English language. At *Blue*, students had to learn an additional language besides English, which could be French, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and attain a certificate in order to graduate. The certificate had to be equivalent to the B1 level of *the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (*CEFR*) – note this competence level as it will be referred to occasionally in this section. This requirement made *Blue* stand out among universities in Vietnam, many of which (including *Red* for example) required only English. In fact, since its inception *Blue* had emphasised command of foreign languages as a key learning outcome (ibid.). At the time of this study,

however, the requirement was applied only to students from the *Language and Culture* (LC) faculty; students in the other three faculties did not have to learn any foreign languages besides English.

Multi-lingualism was also reflected in the interior design (B_TM, B_CV). The nameplates of offices and lecture halls were written in three languages, namely Vietnamese, English and French. In addition, quotes from famous Vietnamese and international personalities, which can be found around campus, were written in their original language and translated into English

That said, this section will first focus on *Blue's* foreign language requirement for *LC* students (4.5.1). Afterwards, I will briefly talk about the few students, both in and outside *LC*, who decided not to get any certificates at all and consequently forfeited their degrees (4.5.2).

### 4.5.1. Learning Chinese: An easy way out

Competence in foreign languages was cited as a selling point of *Blue* students by all *LC* students involved in this study. They said *Blue* students stood out in the job market often because of their command of at least a foreign language, and this is especially true for *LC* students, most of whom would work in hotels, restaurants or tour agencies where foreign language competence was a must:

> *Foreign language is a strong aspect of Blue. For example, some modules are taught in English, and we have to write and defend our dissertation in English, plus you need English and another language to graduate. This is really modern and progressive for a Vietnamese university.* (B_S1_LC)

> *I have heard from alumni that employers recognise us for our language competence* […] *It is very difficult to get a job in the hospitality industry without knowing any foreign language.* (B_S3_LC)

This sentiment was shared by many other if not all participants, from the VC to other students. B_L3_LC, for instance, took pride in his students for their 'dynamism and foreign language capability', some of whom had secured jobs in multinational hotel chains in and outside Vietnam. Elsewhere, B_S1_EC gave an anecdote of being complimented by an employer for 'having good English' and noted that her case was not exceptional among *Blue* students. That said, none of the student knew *Blue's* emphasis on multi-lingualism stemmed from the philosophy of internationalisation not being Americanisation, or its long history of emphasising foreign language competence as a learning outcome. To them, a certificate in a second foreign language was simply 'a graduation requirement' (B_S2_LC), and what they thought of multi-lingualism came from their experiences in trying to attain it in addition to one in English.

Nonetheless, 'foreign language' seemed to be equated with English by the *LC* students (and also *EC* ones for that matter). This was evidenced when they were asked specifically about being required to learn a second foreign language, to which the response was ambivalent:

> *It is good to hold two certificates,* [which] *gives you an edge in your profile and job application, although you might not be able to communicate in both languages* […] *I think English is enough, you cannot be sure the* [other] *language you choose will be used at work.* (B_S2_LC)

> *I don't find it effective having to learn two foreign languages. I mean, learning English is already hard, let alone another language.* [Another foreign language] *would be more feasible for those already good at English, but they are not many, you know how badly English is taught at schools*[25]. (B_S3_LC)

The excerpts suggested *Blue's* language strategy brought students more symbolic than educational value, in the way of certificates to present to employers rather than communicative competence. One reason was the difficulty of learning two foreign languages in the span of a four-year undergraduate programme. Ideally, students only needed to focus on the second foreign language because English had been taught in schools, but this was not the case at least in their experiences because the latter was done poorly. Another, more utilitarian reason, was that any foreign language beyond English was not in demand widely enough to warrant the effort.

Despite said perceived difficulty and low utility of a second foreign language, *LC* students could not opt for solely English as it would make them ineligible for graduation (there were students taking the drastic decision of not getting even an English certificate, see 4.5.2). However, there was an easy way out of this impasse, and the key partly lied in the foreign language requirement itself. As described earlier, the requirement was based on the *CEFR*; more specifically, *LC* students had to attain a certificate equivalent to *CEFR-B1* in English and one language out of French, Chinese, Japanese and Korean. The problem was the *CEFR-B1* equivalent certificate in these four languages differed considerably in difficulty, with Chinese being reportedly easier and French harder than others (B_S2_LC; B_L2_LC), and this discrepancy was not accounted for and compensated by top management. As a result, many students would choose Chinese as their second foreign language:

> *A lot of my friends and I chose Chinese. You only need to learn spelling and how to write in order to get the required certificate. It is easy and quick*. [The equivalent certificate in] *French is harder because you must be somewhat able to communicate.* (B_S3_LC)

[25] In Vietnam, English is taught from Grade 1.

Nevertheless, there were *LC* students who chose French. According to B_L4_LC, these students faced a significant issue of their own. Besides a *CEFR-B1* certificate in French being more difficult, there was a lack of French courses at *Blue*. Thus, it was up to to students to find French courses outside *Blue*; some turned to B_L4_LC and asked for private classes since he had lived in French-speaking countries for over 10 years (B_L4_LC). This lack of stable structural support for foreign languages might have contributed to students choosing the 'easy' ones; otherwise, they would have had to put a lot of effort into not only learning a language but finding courses on their own.

Interestingly, *LC* students seemed passive about getting their language certificates. While the certificates were essential to programme completion and the students knew about this requirement in the beginning, they took little initiative in researching about the languages they could choose or finding language courses (B_S2_LC). Only when they were in the third year did they become more proactive, but by then they did not have enough time to take more difficult languages like French.

### 4.5.2. Leaving without a language certificate

Surprisingly, there were *Blue* students who decided not to attain a certificate, whether in a second foreign language (for *LC* students) or even in English (for students from other faculties). This meant they effectively forfeited their degrees and university graduate status. While such cases were rare, the fact they existed deserves attention in this study. Access to these students, however, was extremely difficult because they had all, in a sense, graduated from *Blue* – they were no longer studying or present on campus. In the end none could be contacted for interview. Therefore, what is reported hereafter was what peers, lecturers and deans said of them, which might not have wholly explained their drastic decisions.

This phenomenon first appeared during a strategic meeting between top management and the faculty of *Professional Training* on curriculum transformation (B_CV). An issue raised there was the high percentage (more than two thirds) of students from this faculty who graduated later than the standard four-year duration of their programmes. The cause was the same in almost all cases: They had finished the required academic and vocational modules but not attained an English certificate in time, mostly due to tardiness or over-commitment to existing employment[26] or employment seeking. Another, closely related issue raised was a very small number of students who never submitted an English certificate and thereby forfeited their degrees. The dean explained that students from *Professional Training* were 'extremely vocationally oriented' (B_CV) and could find employment easily thanks to *Blue's* reputation for the programmes in this faculty. She then added:

[26] Some students from this faculty had already found employment by the final year, both part-time and full-time.

> *Some gave up outright, but some did after a few failed attempts to get a certificate. They saw no need; they already got themselves desirable jobs* [The dean then gave a case study of a student who became a fashion designer without graduating] *Blue is known for student employability; this is especially true for my faculty. Here our strength is our problem.* (B_CV)

The issues of late and non-submission of language certificates were also talked of in other strategic meetings with other faculties, albeit with less severity (B_CV). Subsequent interviews also confirmed the existence of late graduation or dropout due to language and employment:

> *I have not seen anyone in my cohort drop out yet, but some are definitely behind with foreign languages.* (B_S3_LC)

> *Dropouts are very rare; I have only seen one myself, who had a family business. More common are those having to resit one or two courses or not handing in a language certificate in time.* (B_L1_LC)

Lateness or failure to submit foreign language certificates and its association with employment revealed a great deal about *Blue* students and the foreign language requirement. A considerable portion of *Blue* students, especially in *Professional Training*, prioritised employment over their degree. This in turn meant they saw university education as a means to employment, whether in the way of legitimisation (via a degree) or skill training. As a result, if desirable employment was secured, a negligent attitude towards their studies likely followed. However, this could not have wholly been the case because, as said by the dean of *Professional Training*, the students who had found their desired employment still completed all of their modules and attempted (but failed) to get certified in foreign languages. Therefore, there must have been a problem with the language requirement itself. For one, there was possibly a misfit between the requirement and *Blue* students, more so in *Professional Training* than other faculties. Misfit could be in terms of difficulty (e.g. a few *Professional Training* students repeatedly failed to get a certificate) or demand (e.g. *LC* students found little necessity of speaking another foreign language besides English). Alternatively, the problem could lie in the implementation of the requirement rather than the requirement itself. This was evidenced by lack of structural support: There was a shortage of courses for some languages like French (refer back to 4.5.1) and, as mentioned in the strategic meeting with *Professional Training*, English courses at *Blue* left 'a lot of room for improvement' (B_CV).

## 4.6. Chapter conclusion: Non-leaders' sensemaking, the ideal and the reality

This chapter has presented the case study of *Blue*, starting with its institutional profile and unconventional internationalisation strategies, followed by a report of how three particular strategies: research, anti-plagiarism and language, were made sense of by its non-leaders. This section recaps the six most significant empirical findings of this case study.

First, *Blue* did not have internationalisation as a dedicated component strategy, but rather its whole corporate strategy doubled as its internationalisation strategy (4.2.2). In the corporate strategy, *Blue's* vision was to become a Vietnamese university recognised by all universities in the world; the vision was colloquially and frequently communicated by the VC to staff as 'to became a normal university'. To this end, *Blue* believed it must embody the values (e.g. academic integrity) and functions (e.g. research) typical of a 'normal' university. Because the corporate strategy was the internationalisation strategy, these values and functions were also *Blue's* approaches to internationalisation. This meant that the university's internationalisation strategies were rather unconventional because, for example, conducting academic research was considered internationalisation.

Second, the outcomes of *Blue*'s internationalisation strategies, as well as the strategies themselves, were heavily shaped by non-leaders' sensemaking. For instance, both the deans of *Economics and Commerce* and *Language and Culture* devised and implemented initiatives that significantly changed *Blue*'s research and academic integrity. These initiatives were wholly the deans' own, stemming from their past knowledge and experience in combination with their observation of *Blue* and Vietnamese HE, although it has to be acknowledge that the initiatives would not have been feasible without support from senior management. In another example, *Blue* lecturers' concern for their own livelihood and familiarity with *Blue* teaching-heavy culture led them to interpret the deans' initiatives in unfavourable ways, as most saw no point in doing research and considered the strict pursuit of anti-plagiarism unrealistic and risky. Thus, they created workarounds that would compromise the intended outcomes of the initiatives (e.g. subtracting marks instead of failing plagiarising papers) or even withdrew from the initiatives altogether (e.g. quitting *Blue Research Seminars*). Their actions then perpetuated into a common practice that steer internationalisation strategies in an undesired direction (4.4.3, also see 4.4.2).

Third, *Blue* deans had remarkable decision-making power despite their middle management position. Both deans in this study were recruited as strategy drivers rather than administrators of their faculties, and thus enabled to have their own strategic initiatives or more generally to shape their own roles. Furthermore, they could expand the initiatives beyond the confines of their faculties (4.3.1) and even *Blue* itself (4.4.1). To shape their strategic roles, the deans had to make sense of *Blue's* corporate and the conditions of their faculties to devise appropriate initiatives. They were assisted in this endeavour by the VC, who provided them with formal strategic information via documents and briefings (4.3.1).

Fourth, *Blue* lecturers were heavily reliant on teaching and student feedback (4.3.4). Even as a university, *Blue* retained the teaching focus roots of its early days as a vocational school, in that remuneration and promotion still revolved around teaching, central of which was

student feedback. In terms of personnel, old staff were carried over, and those had been recruited since university status were solely tasked with teaching. Therefore, *Blue* lecturers' greatest concerns were teaching quality and student satisfaction and by extension their livelihood, all of which shaped their sensemaking towards internationalisation strategies. It should also be emphasised that they were not interested in any strategic matters and made sense of internationalisation strategies through daily, mundane tasks they were assigned with.

Fifth, *Blue* students were utilitarian, some extremely so. Their accounts about *Turnitin* and the foreign language requirement showed that while they put efforts to adapt to the demands of internationalisation strategies, they would do so in the most facile manner possible. This meant choosing the easiest option available (4.5.1) or finding work-arounds if not violating the rule (4.4.2). In rare circumstances, their rationality led them to abandon their degrees altogether (4.5.2). Like the lecturers, the students also made sense of internationalisation strategies through the tasks they had to fulfil on a daily basis; they showed a lack of interest and awareness of strategic matters.

Lastly and overall, the case study of *Blue*, though centred on the micro level, reveals two strategic management issues at the meso level. On the one hand, there was a great gap between the goals of the strategies (the ideal) and the resources and capabilities of the university (the reality). For instance, very few staff were capable of doing research, plus existing remuneration and promotion structures were heavily oriented towards teaching (4.3.3, 4.3.4). Similarly, the *Turnitin* initiative was hindered by the unfamiliarity with plagiarism and academic writing among both students and lecturers (4.4.2). On the other hand, this gap could be considerably lessened with leadership and communication. B_MM_EC's three research initiatives and his repeated communication of the role of research did create outcomes for the research strategy. For example, some lecturers were already contemplating doing a doctorate, and one in particular (B_L1_EC) established her own research group and invited others (4.3.2, 4.3.3). By contrast, the *Turnitin* initiative apparently lacked such leadership and communication. There was no leadership to energise staff and students, and the only communication provided was training workshops by the library, which focused on the technical usage of *Turnitin* rather than plagiarism and academic integrity as a whole (4.4.2, 4.4.3).

# CHAPTER 5: RED – ENGLISH AS THE CORE OF INTERNATIONALISATION

This chapter presents the remaining case study of *Red*. The structure and reporting style are identical to Chapter 4, starting with the institutional profile of the university (5.1), followed by a report of how some of its internationalisation strategies were made sense of. The strategies are English as the medium of instruction (5.2), joint programmes (5.3) and international accreditation (5.4). I wish to note again that this study takes *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies as given and provides no evaluation of the content.

*Red* was a more straightforward case of strategic management where initiatives were mostly top-down with lecturers, students and even deans taking a passive role. Therefore, I believe presenting the empirical findings in order of *Blue* to *Red* will be more readable, because the readers can first focus on the more complex case of *Blue* and then, when reading the simpler case of *Red*, they can more easily spot cross-case patterns.

To re-iterate Chapter 4, the findings reported below will include not only accounts explicitly about internationalisation but also those about matters pertaining to one's role. This is because, as explained in 4.1.2, the participants' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was embedded within sensemaking of their respectively roles. That is, they rarely paid attention to internationalisation as a sensemaking issue; instead, their concern was simply what they had to do in their roles like going to lectures (for students) or holding a laboratory session (for lecturers). However, it was through making sense of role responsibilities and experiences that they came to understand any internationalisation strategies that those responsibilities and experiences reflected. For instance, when *Red* students made sense of a new module they had just enrolled in, they are led to make sense of how well the lecturer of that module spoke English. This then shaped their perception of English as the medium of instruction, which was a central internationalisation strategy at *Red*.

As a courtesy reminder, please refer back to 4.1.1 for a description of coding acronyms for the participants and other data sources.

## 5.1. Institutional profile

In 2001 the then Vietnamese Prime Minister announced a blueprint for national higher education, which stated: 'Universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh must take a leading role in integrating with higher education worldwide [...] connect with reputable foreign institutions to improve education quality' (Vietnamese Government, 2001). In response, *Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City* (VNUHCM) planned to establish a new member university upon the premise that it would partner with foreign higher education institutions so that students and *VNUHCM* staff could enjoy international education at home and in turn

*VNUHCM* could benchmark itself against and learn from the world (R_D). *Red* was finally established after two years of planning, at the end of 2003.

As a side note, there are two *Vietnam National Universities*, one in Saigon/Ho Chi Minh and another in Hanoi. Both are not universities per se but rather a federation of universities, united under a central management. The member universities are autonomous in the sense that they are legal entities in their own right, have their own management and thus can decide their own operations. However, they are accountable to the central management of their respective *Vietnam National University*, and certain decisions like opening joint programmes with foreign partners must be vetted centrally. In return, they enjoy greater freedom than other public universities because *Vietnam National Universities* report directly to Parliament while non-VNU public universities are each under a ministry (e.g. University of Medicine belongs to the Ministry of Health), which is then under the Government.

Since inception, *Red* has fulfilled its expectations and set up partnerships with individuals and institutions around the world. It is also the first Vietnamese university to use English as the medium of instruction and the official administrative language – all forms and documents are translated into English. Another outstanding strategic aspect lies in recruitment: Academic posts are often given to those who have done a doctorate in an English speaking or Western country, like the US, UK, Australia, Germany. This is hoped to place the university's research outputs in high impact journals, improve teaching quality and help it attain international accreditations.

*Red* is now in its third strategic period from 2016 to 2020. This study, however, focuses on its second period from 2011 to 2015.

### 5.1.1. Corporate strategy

*Red's* vision was

> *By 2015 Red will have established the basic foundations of a research university. It will have a substantial academic body who are competent and committed; a strong administrative body who are committed and professional; students who perform well academically and career-wise; state-of-the-art governance and management adherent to international conventions; infrastructure that is modern, sufficient and uniform in quality for teaching and research; major research and technology transfer projects in science, engineering, technology, economy that are aligned with the development of Ho Chi Minh city and Vietnam.* (R_D)

And the mission was

*Play a trailblazer role within VNUHCM, reaching regional and international standards in all areas, and create a positive spillover effect to assist other member universities in moving forward*

*Provide high quality undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in engineering, economics, business and fields that are necessary to the development of the country*

*Conduct academic and applied research and technology transfer with the industries and society*

*Leverage our expertise to serve the community and industries*

(ibid.)

The vision and mission were to be realised through 11 component strategies: *Infrastructure*, *Human resources*, *Governance*, *Teaching*, *Research*, *International relations*, *Culture*, *Media and image*, *Finance*, *Accreditation*, *Students*. Each component strategy contained a general aim and specific strategic objectives and actions. The corporate strategy is accompanied by an implementation plan laying out yearly key performance indicators for each component strategy. Interestingly, the implementation plan also contained a set of strategic objectives and actions for each component strategy, but these were different from those stated in the corporate strategy. The Pro-Vice Chancellor in internationalisation, who was an interviewee (R_TM), said this inconsistency between the two documents (corporate strategy and implementation plan) was due to them being written by different people, but both were based on discussions by top management and were checked by the Vice-Chancellor (VC) before publishing. R_TM added that strategic matters were largely decided by the VC, so as long as he approved a document it would be published.

### 5.1.2. Internationalisation strategies

There was no dedicated internationalisation component strategy, but internationalisation was often mentioned in the 11 component strategies listed above. I managed to compile a list of eight internationalisation strategies from two documents, namely the coporate strategy and the accompanying action plan (R_D):

1. Implement English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in all programmes
2. Attain regional and international accreditations for all programmes
3. Open joint programmes with reputable, accredited HEIs in developed countries
4. Disseminate research internationally, in high-impact journals
5. Develop international research partnerships, organise international conferences
6. Recruit academic staff who were educated in good universities in developed countries
7. Develop and maintain infrastructure to international standards
8. Organise student exchanges

I cross-checked them with the Pro-Vice Chancellor in internationalisation (R_TM) and the head of *External Relations Office* (R_MM_ER), who added three:

9. Design programmes based on those in developed countries, especially the US
10. Recruit international students and staff
11. Attain regional and international accreditations for management systems

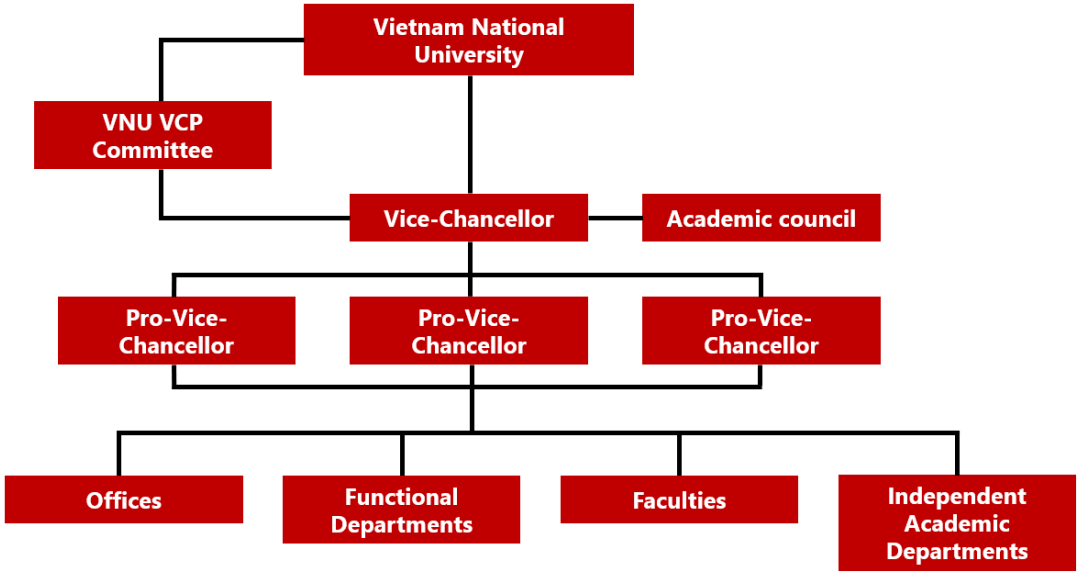
Among the 11 internationalisation strategies, strategy 1 (EMI) was stated as the most important, so much so that *Red's* identity was tied to it: 'We are the first Vietnamese university to wholly teach in English' (R_TM). Nonetheless, *Red* had no official conceptualisation of internationalisation as *Blue* did. The internationalisation strategies were 'intuitive' and 'learned from other universities in Vietnam and abroad' (ibid.).

Campus visits and document analysis showed *Red* was very active in communicating and branding its internationalisation. Among the 11 strategies above, strategy 1 (EMI), 2 (accreditations), 3 (joint programmes), 4 (research dissemination), 6 (recruitment of foreign-trained staff) were consistently communicated to prospective staff and students (R_MM_ER). In fact, they were mentioned in all of the presentations and counselling sessions on *Red's* open day, which I attended (R_CV). On top of this, the English language was consistently, though not solely, used in internal communication (e.g. emails) (R_MM_ER), official documents related to teaching and research (e.g. syllabi) and promotion materials (R_D), including posts on social media (R_SM). One striking instance of English use was also said open day (R_CV), where all materials and many presentations were in English or bilingual, and during the opening ceremony the VC greeted all guests and conducted a Q&A session in English. *Red's* international image was further reinforced by the presence of foreigners, which I observed during many campus visits (R_CV). They comprised foreign students on exchange and occasionally representatives of partner higher education institutions that *Red* had joint programmes with (to add, all of the partners were invited to open days to promote themselves). Lastly, the word 'international' itself appeared in every promotion activity, materials and even in the *Red's* name and logo.

### 5.1.3. Organisational structure

*Red's* structure was as follows

*Figure* 6. *Red's* organisational structure




As mentioned, *Red* was accountable to *VNUHCM*, the Director of which had the power to appoint *Red's* VC, and this accountability extended to the political dimension through the *Vietnamese Communist Party* (VCP) *Committee*[27] at *VNUHCM*.

Within *Red*, the VC oversaw all strategic and administrative decisions and also sat on the *Academic council* whose members included top management, heads of offices and functional departments, deans and senior academics. The council made decisions on teaching, research and the recruitment and professional development of academic staff. There were three Pro-Vice Chancellors, each in charge of a distinct component strategy and the corresponding offices and functional departments. Daily administration was taken care of by the nine offices: *Administration*, *Undergraduate*, *Postgraduate*, *Equipment*, *Finance*, *Student Activity*, *Research*, *External Relations*, *Youth Organisation*[28]. Specialised, project-based tasks were handled by the six functional departments: *Quality Assurance*, *Information Technology Service*, *Research and Technology Transfer*, *Sustainable Development in Education*, *Project Management*, *Technology and Entrepreneur Incubator*. There were four faculties: *Computer Science*, *Electrical Engineering*, *Biotechnology*, *Business School*. The seven independent academic departments generally had no programmes of their own (few did) and instead

[27] There is a VCP Committee at nearly every public organisation in Vietnam. One Committee can be thought of as the VCP's branch in one organisation, acting as overseer of VCP activities and members in it. Sometimes the Committee also decides on strategic and operational matters. Red had a VCP Committee, which was accountable to the VCP Committee of VNUHCM.

[28] Youth Organisation is part of the VCP and mainly targets to teenagers and young adults. It has branches in all HEIs, and the branching is very often down to faculty level (i.e. each faculty has a Youth Organisation branch under the HEI one).

taught for multiple faculties; they included *Construction Engineering*, *English*, *Mathematics*, *Industrial Engineering*, *Biomedical Engineering*, *Physics*, *Environmental Engineering*.

With the institutional profile of *Red* established, the following sections will report how three internationalisation strategies were made sense of by the deans, lecturers and students at *Red*: English as the medium of instruction (5.2), joint programmes (5.3) and accreditation (5.4).

## 5.2. English as the medium of instruction: An ear from the top

*Red* prided itself on being the first Vietnamese university to use English as the medium of instruction (EMI) for all programmes. In fact, EMI was the first thing mentioned by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (R_TM) and head of *External Relations Office* (R_MM_ER) when talking about *Red* internationalisation during entry interviews. It had always been integral to *Red's* identity and *Teaching* component strategy since founding. In the 2011-2015 strategic period, EMI was also considered one of *Red's* inherent strengths in its SWOT analysis (R_D). A long-standing lecturer, R_L2_BS recalled that over his seven years at *Red* he had seen students' English 'got better and better' and this created the condition for updating existing modules and introducing new ones or even whole programmes. The overall teaching and learning quality and *Red's* reputation, according to him, had improved significantly.

The EMI strategy was implemented via lecturers' contract (ability to teach in English was a requisite), teaching materials (all were in English), and of course all teaching and assessment. It was stated by R_MM_ER that if lecturers had been caught teaching in Vietnamese, they would have faced penalty. As shall be seen later in this section, this was easier said than done.

One major part of the EMI strategy was the provision of courses in the English language. This was done to prepare students for learning academic modules in English, because the English competence of the majority was not enough for them to effectively engage in academic studies (R_MM_ER). Indeed, the dean of *Computer Science* (R_MM_CS), who was a participant, said he wished for better student intake in terms of English competence. In addition, the courses aimed to help them attain an international English certificate like IELTS or TOEFL. There were four courses in total: New students would first take two courses in general English and progressed to another two in academic English; all courses were handled by the *Department of English*. The English courses were mandatory but interestingly did not serve as pre-requisites for any academic modules, so students could enrol in the latter without having to pass any of the English courses. Students in joint programmes, however, followed a different roadmap with regards to English courses. They would take five courses in general English delivered by an external, private provider located on campus called *langcen*

(pseudonym) and then the aforementioned two academic English courses by the *Department of English*.

This section will look at *Red* lecturers and students' view of teaching and learning in English (5.2.1) and the issues surrounding the EMI strategy (5.2.2), before finally zooming in on a strategic change concerning *langcen*, initiated by students in joint programmes (5.2.3).

### 5.2.1. English as a necessity for branding, employment and discipline

EMI was received favourably by those on the frontline – lecturers and students. Students said learning in English was a major if not the top pull factor of *Red* and gave it an 'international flair' (R_S1_BS). Indeed, this international flair was also the reason they, as well as lecturers and deans, thought EMI was essential to *Red's* identity and branding:

> *To me EMI is a normal and necessary thing* [for us] *to become international. And it sets up apart from other Vietnamese universities* [...] *benefits students, giving them an edge once they graduate.* (R_MM1_BS)
>
> *A university cannot just call itself international without using English.* (R_L2_BS)
>
> *Teaching and learning in English is the most special thing about Red and makes it an outstanding choice.* (R_L2_BS)

Some students, like R_S2_BS and R_S1_IE, even thought EMI meant English would be used for all communication rather than just teaching, when they first saw *Red's* advertisement as high school students. This made them see *Red* as 'extremely progressive' (R_S1_IE), but of course post-enrolment they realised the mistake; nonetheless, they still regarded the university highly for its integration of English into teaching, and R_S2_BS in particular tried to speak English outside lectures as she believed *Red* was a good environment to practice the language. Lecturers, on the other hand, saw EMI as an opportunity to improve their own English, which might in turn help them publish (R_L1_CS), network or even develop an international career (R_L2_CS).

Both lecturers and students also felt that even without EMI, they would have had to speak English anyway due to pressure from the larger professional and disciplinary contexts:

> *Many want to work for multinational firms, so English is a must. I mean even local companies now require English; at the very least it is a bonus in your application.* (R_S4_BS)
>
> *Everything in our field is in English. Translating terms like object oriented programming into Vietnamese does not make sense, not to mention translation takes time and when we have the text to teach it will already have been outdated.* (R_L2_BS)

This demonstrated that *Red's* EMI strategy was in line with social demands, either at the 'communicative or specialist' level (R_S2_CS). Thus, the strategy was implemented without deliberate push: 'Teaching in English is natural for us. No one questions it or tries to do otherwise.' (R_MM1_BS). Interestingly, only interviewees from *Computer Science* (CS) referred to their field as a motivator for EMI, whereas those from *Business School* (BS) and *Industrial Engineering* (IE) did not; this suggested differences in perception across disciplines.

### 5.2.2. Working around language barriers

Further interviews revealed the implementation of EMI was not as bright as the sentiment for it. First, there was a lack of English competence among both students and lecturers (R_MM_CS), which hindered teaching effectiveness and created gaps in academic performance:

> *We have a renown scholar here in the CS whose modules are super stimulating, but you cannot understand a thing he says in class because of his accent. The best you can do is read the slides.* (R_S3_CS)
>
> *My students grasp the subject matter; they can design algorithms and code, but they cannot express themselves in English or write assignments well.* (R_L2_CS)
>
> *Peers are bad at English. I can finish my exam in half time and most of them cannot even understand all the questions.* (R_S1_IE)

The solution, however, was nowhere to be found. For one, recruiting more English-competent students was difficult because *Red* was located 'far away from the city centre' (R_MM_ER) and had a lot of competition from other major public universities, even within *VNUHCM*. The competitors were older, more famous, located more centrally and had themselves started offering programmes in English (R_TM; R_MM_CS). This was not to mention Vietnamese students as a whole were ill-equipped with English, because of 'the low quality English teaching in schools' (R_MM_CS) (recall that this low quality was mentioned by *Blue* students at in 4.5.1). Recruiting better lecturers was neither easy because there were reportedly not enough Vietnamese lecturers who could teach and publish in English (R_TM). On the matter of lecturers' English competence, nearly every student was complaining about the pronunciation and accent of their lecturers; for example, R_S2_BS recalled one of her lecturers mispronouncing the company name *Amazon*. One exception was R_S4_CS, who showed more awareness and sympathy towards *Red's* difficulty with lecturer recruitment: 'I heard from the *Academic Affairs Office* that we were short on lecturers. That's maybe why the bad ones are still here.' He knew this thanks to his part-time job as an IT assistant, which afforded contact with many offices and functional departments where he overheard conversations about university-level issues. In other words, he was in the right place at the right time to gain access to formal strategic information. By comparison, other students made sense of lecturers' English competence, and the whole EMI strategy for that matter,

solely through their experiences with their studies, which involved the daily lectures where they listened to lecturers and their peers speaking English.

As a side note, lecturers and students were largely unaware of how the EMI strategy was implemented. For example, lecturers knew there were English courses to support students with their academic studies, but not how the courses were designed and delivered: 'I don't know what they teach [at the *Department of English*], so I cannot comment on whether they are doing a good job or not' (R_L4_BS). They said the courses were not a matter of interest for them, and they were only concerned with whether students understood them and handed in 'intelligible assignments or exam papers' (R_L1_CS). Students, on the other hand, did not know how English was factored in during lecturer recruitment and performance evaluation. Amusingly, their concern was the reverse of the lecturers', in that as long as the lecturers' English was intelligible, everything would be fine (R_S1_IE).

Lecturers and students had 'workarounds' (R_S2_IE) to cope with one another's English competence and their own. On the students' side, what had been taught in English in lectures would be repeated later on in Vietnamese in *tutorials*, a special kind of study arrangement at *Red* where senior, high-performing students were tasked with helping their juniors revise previous lectures, especially in preparation for exams and assignments. Tutorials were considered a 'godsend' (R_S1_BS) by the majority of students, and there were reportedly many who 'only waited til tutorials to truly learn something' (ibid.). The demand for tutorials was so great that students went onto *Red Social*, a Facebook community created by *Red* students (similar to *Blue Confession*, see 4.4.2), to look for or advertise private tutoring service, which was at times paid (R_SM). Three students in this study had used such service (R_S1_BS; R_S2_BS; R_S2_CS), but they said the reason was not only their inability to understand certain content in English, but the content itself was also difficult.

On the lecturers' side, workaround meant they sometimes had no choice but to switch to Vietnamese:

> *For lectures I speak in English, but in laboratory sessions I show students how to work with computers in Vietnamese* […] *We lecturers have to think of education first, and although we try our best to get students to communicate in English, their disciplinary understanding is more important.* (R_L1_CS)

> *When lecturers see our bewildered face they switch to Vietnamese, more often than you think, but I heard that in BS they speak English more than us.* (R_S1_IE)

As can be seen from the excerpts, the lecturers' teaching philosophy was to prioritise teaching effectiveness over EMI. Contrary to what R_MM_ER said earlier, no one was reportedly penalised for switching to Vietnamese, but R_L1_CS did note that language switch

should 'sparingly' occur and with reason, or a lecturer would likely to receive bad feedback from students, consequently creating a basis for penalty. The most telling finding, however, came from R_S2_IE; he studied some modules taught by the VC, who spoke 'excellent English', and recalled that even the VC had to switch to Vietnamese from time to time to ensure student' comprehension.

Thus, it appeared that the EMI strategy was not implemented as intended, in the sense that occasional compromises to the strategy had to be made in favour of learning and teaching effectiveness. R_MM_CS lamented about this 'unwanted friction between [use of] English and [teaching of] content', but he seemed to attribute the problem more to students: On the one hand, he understood it was simply 'impossible' to recruit enough students competent in English to make up a majority due to, as just stated above, competition from other universities and the rather weak English competence of Vietnamese students in general. On the other hand, however, he remarked that English competence for lecturers was not as important because 'expertise must be core' and an applicant would be recruited as long as he/she scored at least 7 on the IELTS[29] and maintained 'acceptable articulation' (ibid.). What was acceptable articulation could definitely be a matter of date at *Red* because, as stated above, nearly every student was complaining about the pronunciation and accent of their lecturers.

All these varying views of EMI, plus the fact that it was compromised occasionally, strongly suggested the strategy was too ambitious and did not fit *Red's* resources and environment. Simply put, *Red* lecturers and students were yet capable of EMI, and there were not enough Vietnamese lecturers and students who were competent in English to recruit. As a consequence, workarounds had to be devised, whether in the form of formally organised tutorials, the coping behaviour of students in seeking private tutoring, or the practice of language switch by lecturers. Nevertheless, attitude towards EMI was positive, with the main complaint of students and lecturers' English competence being accommodated by these workarounds.

To joint students, however, there was one EMI-related issue that no workaround was available.

### 5.2.3. Contestation, social media and leadership

As described earlier, one key part of the EMI strategy was to provide English courses for students so that they could undertake academic studies in English. This provision was

[29] The highest score for IELTS is 9, with 0.5 increments. According to statistics by Cambridge Assessment, the average for Vietnamese was 5.92 in 2017 (https://www.ielts.org/teaching-and-research/test-taker-performance).

different for students of local programmes and joint programmes. While the former took four English courses by *Red's Department of English*, the latter had to take five by an on-campus, private language centre called *langcen* and then two by the *Department of English*. This arrangement was put in place one year before this study and had been removed by the time data collection commenced.

*Langcen's* five courses were 'problematic in so many ways' (R_S2_BS) that they affected joint students' whole programmes. First, they would take several semesters to complete, and the lessons in each week amounted to 20 hours combined. This meant that joint students had to considerably postpone all academic studies and in turn their transfer to the partner institution (students typically studied two years at *Red* and two years abroad with a partner institution, see 5.3 for more details). To make matters worse, students could not skip any of *langcen's* courses unless they had scored well on its placement test, and even then they still had to follow the intensive 20hr/week scheduling. Teaching quality was another problematic area, as vividly recounted by one joint student:

> *My instructor who was a foreigner told us that our class was the first time he had taught English.* […] *The activities were pointless, can you imagine doing crosswords about animals or colouring objects at university! Each lesson was a drag, and we had to suffer this for hours every week. Langcen did not help anybody.* (R_S3_BS)

The overall sentiment towards *langcen* was that its courses bore no effect and the instructors and administrative staff were unprofessional. Some students even joked that the only point of *langcen's* courses was 'to make friends and chat in class' (R_S1_BS).

On top of the problematic scheduling and quality, *langcen's* courses were accounted into the already very high tuition fee for joint programmes (compared to local ones). In addition, some students accused *langcen* of questionable financial practices due to it charging them separately for tuition and learning materials. All these factors were exacerbated by the *Academic Affairs Office*, who were dismissive of students' complaints: 'I asked if I could learn somewhere else because *langcen* was horrible, and an office staff scolded me for being lazy!' (R_S2_BS).

All of these factors resulted in widespread discontent: 'We were angry and worried at the same time. Nobody wanted to study for more than four years' (R_S1_BS), which students turned to *Red Social* to voice:

> *This is extremely frustrating! Nobody wants to go to class. The Office of Academic Affairs know we are learning nothing and yet they still force attendance* […] *Langcen is doing an abysmal job preparing us for the IETLS, why*

> *can't we just stay home and learn?* […] *To future generations, you should try your best to get 6.5 IELTS before coming here to skip all this non-sense.* (R_SM)
>
> *I am deeply upset upon being noticed that I owed langcen 1mil VND in textbooks. That is not a small figure for us students. When we received the materials langcen never said anything about payment, nor were we offered not to accept them* […] *This is a scam!* (ibid.)
>
> *The first two courses at langcen were a big letdown; I met only bad instructors, bad in pedagogy and demeanour. The Office of Academic Affairs are not sympathetic at all; one admin was like scolding me when he saw I gave langcen negative feedback* […] *I wish the university would change how general English is handled because at this rate it might take three or four years to complete all the pre-sessional English. How can joint students transfer in time?* (ibid.)

A quick search using '*langcen*' as keyword returned 11 such posts, each having in the proximity of 100 reactions[30] (the last quote above gained 200 reactions). For comparison, the usual post on *Red Social* had only up to 10 reactions (R_SM), indicating the severity of the present issues with *langcen*. Among these posts, one stood out because it was both a complaint and rally:

> *I am very angry, but I have heard that many have been turned away by the Office of Academic Affairs. I want to ask all of you joints out there if we can band up and appeal to the university about langcen? I think because we came individually they can easily dismiss us, let's try doing it together.* (R_SM)

This post was commented on by the administrator of *Red Social*, who gave his/her support. This person also endorsed many complaint posts about *langcen* and even made one post calling for students to contact their faculties and the VC.

Finally what was called an 'uprising' (R_S1_BS) happened. A petition was created and forwarded to the VC, who resolved the issue by allowing joint students to opt out of *langcen* if they signed an agreement to submit an IELTS or TOEFL certificate in time for transfer. Unfortunately, no data could be gathered on the specificities of what the VC did (e.g. whether a meeting was summoned and with whom). That said, the uprising was mentioned by all students, joint and local alike, as an example of *Red's* uniqueness among public universities: 'This is the only place you can find a VC who actually cares' (R_S2_CS). In fact, in nearly every interview the VC was referred to as a frequent reader of *Red Social* and very attentive to students' needs:

> *The thing that I remember the most about Red is how the VC is very engaged with students. He often goes to the canteen at lunch time and ask stuff like 'is the food to your liking?'. You see that roof shadowing the bus stop? He noticed*

[30] Readers of Facebook posts can use the reaction feature to express their attitude.

> *we were standing in the sun and commissioned it. And he reads and comments on Red Social[31], so if you have a serious matter just post there.* (R_S2_CS)
>
> *I read Red Social from time to time because important matters are there. Students know it is an effective communication channel because the VC follows it closely.* (R_L2_CS)

The VC's focus on students and his use of *Red Social* made this Facebook community a catalyst for change. He commented on two of the aforementioned 11 posts about *langcen*, telling the poster to contact him directly via email with details of the courses they were dissatisfied with so that he could 'rectify them' (R_SM). Scrolling through *Red Social*, it could easily be seen that the VC took care to comment on complaints by students, e.g. about exam scheduling or dealing with the offices. One particularly serious case that he got hold of was allegations of a lecturer harassing his students with the poster claiming to be a parent; he/she was invited by the VC to campus (ibid.). Thus, *Red Social* was found by students to be 'the best feedback method because it reach[ed] the ear from the top' (R_S1_IE) and much 'preferable to the feedback forms' handed out at the end of each course which would go to the *Academic Affairs Office* 'for burial' (R_S5_BS). In other words, thanks to the VC, *Red Social* was *de facto* communication channel even though not formally recognised as such. His leadership also drove a portion of staff to treat the page seriously and follow it, like R_S2_CS and R_MM_ER.

The contestation further showed a great gap between the EMI strategy and what happened on the ground. What was intended (English courses for joint students) could not be realised by available resources (*langcen*), but in this case the misfit could not be accommodated by any workarounds. Perhaps more importantly, it also shed lights into the innerworkings of *Red* as an organisation. For one, the key structure to help students with academic matters – the *Academic Affairs Office* was not effective. Instead, *Red Social*, an online community for purely social purposes, became the place to turn to for not only academic but other matters. This, however, did not happen naturally but through the action of the VC, who interacted with students there and followed with interventions. Indeed, what students said highlighted the positive impact of his hands-on approach to strategic management and administration and the emphasis he placed on students, with *langcen* being just one among the many issues he intervened in.

## 5.3. Joint programmes: Positions and perspectives

[31] A feature of *Red Social* was that those who posted on it are kept anonymous, but those who commented on posts would have their *Facebook* accounts revealed. This was why students were aware of the VC's presence on *Red Social*.

Besides EMI, joint programmes constituted a major internationalisation strategy for *Red*. The joint programme strategy was written into *Red's* corporate strategy as follows:

> *Open more joint programmes with leading foreign higher education institutions* [and] *actively seek accredited higher education institutions and sign MOU/MOA*[32] *with*
>
> (R_D)

At the time of data collection there were 22 joint programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, which accounted for nearly half of *Red's* portfolio. All of the joint programmes were between *Red* and a university in a Western country, including Australia, USA, the UK and Germany. I focused on joint undergraduate programmes because they were in the overwhelming majority at 19 out of 22, not to mention their number actually overtook that of local undergraduate programmes (15). Thus, joint undergraduate programmes were likely to produce richer data than their postgraduate counterparts.

Undergraduate joint programmes came in three forms, namely *2:2*, *3:1* and *4:0*, which respectively meant that students had to do (a) two years at home and two years abroad, (b) three years at home and one year abroad or (c) the whole programme at home. During the home stage, joint students took courses that were pre-requisite for them to transfer to the abroad stage or, in the case of *4:0*, to be eligible for final-year assignments and exams administered by the partner institution on *Red's* campus. Nearly all of the pre-requisite courses actually belonged to local programmes, so interestingly joint students studied with, if not in the exact same way as local ones before the transfer. Another interesting feature of joint programmes was that assessment results for pre-requisite courses were not counted towards the degree. In other words, only courses taught by the partner institution in the transfer stage (for *2:2* and *3:1* programmes), or the results of final-year assignments and exams administered by the partner (for *4:0* programmes), determined what level of achievement students would graduate with. Accordingly, the degree would be issued by the partner; in the case of students in *4:0* programmes, this meant that they would get a Western degree for studying four years in Vietnam, with the same curriculum, facilities and lecturers as local students. Lastly, the entry requirements for joint programmes were generally lower than those for local ones.

Joint programmes usually started with a foreign higher education institution contacting *Red* about a partnership. After initial negotiations and signing of an MOA, *Red* had to prepare a proposal to submit to *VNUHCM* and later defend it in order to open a programme with the partner. If passed, the programme would be allowed to recruit until the MOA expired, at which point *Red* extended the MOA and then prepared and defended a proposal for

[32] Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). These documents preceeded the opening of joint programmes between *Red* and a partner.

programme maintenance with *VNUHCM*. The paperwork for joint programmes was managed by *Red's External Relations Office* (ER).

### 5.3.1. Programme management: Centralisation and entanglements

Given the presence of joint programmes, surprisingly little was mentioned about them by the academic managers of *BS* and *CS*. *BS'* deputy dean (R_MM1_BS) and *CS'* dean (R_MM_CS) said joint programmes had already been there before they got their post, so they kept 'them where they should be' and only intervened when something required attention, which 'to best memory [had] not happened' (R_MM_CS). They recommended asking *ER* or the *Academic Affairs Office* for more details because joint programmes were not within the remit of the faculties. The role of the faculties, and thus their own role as deans, was to provide information requested by *ER* for paperwork and to make sure joint students received all pre-requisite courses. R_MM1_BS added that international partnerships in any form mostly came from top management or *ER*, who occasionally informed *BS* of opportunities and asked if they wanted to take them on. The deputy dean also talked of potential difficulty for faculties to open their own programmes, or more generally to have any strategic initiatives:

> *Sometimes we come up with ideas benefitting everyone but possess no power to realise them, so we need help from the offices. Most are very helpful, but a few are, how to put it, unenthusiastic. Such instances make us reserved, and whenever we want to propose something we have to think whom it involves and how.*
>
> *But I know this is not wholly their fault, but rather they are chained down by too much governmental regulations. In Vietnam we have endless unreasonable red tapes. It entangles everyone from top to bottom. If you want to do good you often have to find a way around everything, not breaking, just going around. This takes a lot of effort, and not many think it's worth it, nor have they enough resources to spare if they do.* (R_MM1_BS)

This lengthy account spoke volume about not only joint programmes but the governance at *Red* and the role of deans. More specifically, it showed how much faculty-originated initiatives like opening a programme could be hindered by a myriad of entanglements, including *Red's* centralised governance structure, governmental regulations, human motivation and resource dependence. However, there was space to manoeuvre if one was 'well familiar with laws and regulations and [knew] the right people to contact at the right time' (ibid.); unfortunately, R_MM1_BS could not give specific examples as they were too sensitive. R_MM1_BS' response also showed that *Red* deans' role was to implement top-down strategies rather than devise the strategic directions of their faculties. This was confirmed by R_MM1_BS' superior, the dean of *BS* (R_MM2_BS): 'We almost entirely followed the direction of top management'. He said this in an email responding to my request for an interview, in which he refused the interview and hinted that any interviews about strategic matters should be done with top management instead of him.

Hearing much about centralisation, I decided to ask *ER* for an interview about joint programmes. Although the focus of this study was on academic faculties/departments rather than administrative offices like *ER*, it was likely in this instance that *ER* would offer insights into how the faculties worked. That said, the head of *ER* (R_MM_ER) granted me an interview. She first explained the 'arduous' process of setting up and maintaining joint programmes, from initial negotiations and MOA signing to preparing necessary documentations, defending each programme proposal in front of *VNUHCM*, and finally redoing everything every few years to maintain the programmes. More importantly, it was *ER's* responsibility to spearhead all of these tasks. The faculties' role was to provide information for paperwork and be present during defense. It was in this interview that I learned nearly all joint programmes had started with a foreign institution approaching *Red* rather than the other way round, which begged the question whether there had been one originating from *Red*, especially the faculties. The response was negative:

> *Not that I know of since taking this position* […] *Even if the faculties had a strong connection that could result in a joint, any talks would still have to go through us and top management.* (R_MM_ER)

She then elaborated that 'unlike Western universities, [*Red's*] governance was central', and therefore there was 'little the faculties could decide by themselves', which strongly corroborated what R_MM1_BS and R_MM2_BS said. She also recounted the many difficulties *ER* faced but that were invisible to the faculties, particularly a sudden change in the Vietnamese *Higher education Law* in 2015 that 'brought about huge red tapes'; even she herself 'could not have anticipated joint programmes were this complicated when [she] was still a lecturer'. In brief, her accounts showed that deans indeed had a minor role in joint programmes, with little decision-making power (e.g. to open one) and information (e.g. about the difficulties surrounding them).

### 5.3.2. Insider and outsider

Unlike the deans, students had much to say about joint programmes. Their responses generally fell into two camps, depending on whether they were studying in a joint programme – in this section, students in a joint programme will be marked with *. To begin with, there was consensus from both camps about the appeal of joint programmes for Vietnamese students:

> *We want to study abroad but cannot afford four years' worth of tuition and living. Joint programmes shave off at least two years' expenses and in the end you still get a foreign degree.* (R_S1_BS*)

> *Red is like a bridge. Very few know how to go through British application or pass the SAT. Red lets you skip all that; you study in a Vietnamese high school, come here and then get into an American university, and for cheap.* (R_S1_CS)

> *I would have flown abroad after high school, but my English was not good enough and I knew our Vietnamese high school diplomas would not qualify. Red gave me two years of getting used to studying in English.* (R_S2_CS*)

Joint programmes were clearly favoured by students to local ones. This strongly suggested that studying in the West (recall all joint programmes were with Western universities) was perceived as better than at home, which prompted me to probe for the reason. The students felt Western education '[was] better and more advanced' (R_S2_CS*), and more importantly most of them observed a degree from the West 'carr[ied] much more weight' (R_S2_BS*) to Vietnamese employers who might not 'pay attention to the programme or issuing institution, as long as it [was] from a developed country' (R_S1_IE). A few referred to the opportunity to stay and work in the host country (R_S2_CS*). The last reason was cultural exposure or travelling experiences but the students said these were 'minor' (R_S2_BS*). This suggested the employability of a degree was the criterion by which students judged their university education, possibly more important than what they could learn or experience.

Several students added joint programmes were also appealing because they provided an easy way to enter *Red*:

> *Entry requirements are lower than for local programmes, so many put a joint as backup in case they fail a preferred local. If they cannot afford the tuition, they have to try hard on grades so that in the second or third year they can apply for a change to a local.* (R_S2_CS*)

> *Joint programmes are more expensive of course but so easier to enter; in fact, the requirements are on the level of a much weaker university. It is like buying your way into Red, and once you get in you can switch programmes with ease.* (R_S2_IE)

As to why some would go to such lengths and expenses, the students said *Red* was one of the best universities in Saigon and increasingly popular in recent years, and its graduates were more employable. The issue of intake quality was then raised. While the students agreed quality was affected, they found the compromise of entry requirements necessary for the sake of recruitment, because 'there [were] few people rich and smart at the same time' (R_S3_CS); R_S2_CS* added those applying for joint programmes simply had to know what they were 'signing up for' and set their expectations accordingly. Interestingly, joint students remarked that intake quality was not a big concern for them. Because they attended the same lectures as local peers during the home stage (refer back to the start of 5.3 for how joint programmes were configured), they could choose to work with high performers, most of whom were local students, during group projects, at the same time avoiding joint students who had got into *Red* by abusing the lower entry requirements of joint programmes.

The thid and last point of convergence between local and joint students was that, like their deans, they were unaware of how joint programmes were set up or any formal information about specific joint programmes (e.g. how long a programme had been running). As was the

case for EMI, what the students knew and said about joint programmes came wholly from their experiences applying for and then being in one or, for local students, talking to their joint peers.

When asked about the specifics, responses between local and joint students started to diverge. On the matter of local and joint students learning together, while local students were rather indifferent, saying 'it [was] okay' or they '[did] not think too much about it' (R_S2_IE), joint students were quick to voice their mixed feelings:

> *I am not saying that the courses are bad or anything; some are quite good in fact, but that we pay double or triple the tuition to receive the same education* [as local students] *does not feel right.* (R_S1_BS*)

> *It is great that we get to know so many people, but at the same time I wonder what is the difference between* [local] *programmes and ours.* (R_S2_CS*)

The sense of not getting the value they paid for was more prominent among students who did *3:1* and the most so *4:0* programmes. Moreover, while some partner institutions did require special pre-requisite courses not available to local students, these were few and some (e.g. basic chemistry and biology were compulsory for an American business programme) were questioned by the students in terms of necessity (R_S5_BS; R_S2_IE). The special courses might also present a problem in themselves, as one joint student recounted:

> *I needed an advanced course in microeconomics, but* [the *Academic Affairs Office*] *cancelled it without notice, mostly likely because there were only two of us going to* [the partner university] *in 2017* […] *Luckily we requested and got the course back.* (R_S3_BS*)

This 'close call' (R_S3_BS*) was met with strong reaction from her focus group who all agreed the cancellation was unacceptable negligence. Unfortunately, I could not follow up with the *Academic Affairs Office* about it. One local student expressed that he 'could never imagine such a thing' (R_S4_BS), to which one student of a British joint programme responded:

> *Of course you cannot experience these things as an outsider. The Academic Affairs Office always scold and scare people in my programme about falling behind with IELTS certification whenever they see us. They say* [the partner institution] *got angry because our profiles were not up to par.* (R_S2_BS*)

This showed a clear gap in how much local students (outsiders) and joint ones (insiders) knew, even when both were in the same lecturers. The latter's position afforded them unique situations, like encounters with the *Academic Affairs Office*, where they witnessed first hand the problems of joint programmes. That said, joint students were unanimous that they had never raised what they said above with their faculties, the offices or even the VC, either directly or on *Red Social*. This was surprising because every student interviewed extolled *Red's* student service and that they could have a voice here unlike at other Vietnamese

universities, leading to the successful contestation described in 5.2.3. The students were asked why their attitude towards joint programmes was more passive than towards other matters, at least EMI. This was where insiders and outsiders converged again:

> *It depends on which issue we are talking about. When it comes to our study we just want to pass courses and get the degree over with, so as long as we chug along just fine we will do nothing.* (R_S3_BS*, seconded by other *BS* students)

> *Langcen was so abysmal that many took action, but even then not everyone participated. Some, like me, were allowed to skip half of it, but if I had had to do the whole thing I would have surely protested because otherwise it would take five years for me to graduate.* (R_S2_CS*)

> *What you said applies for local students too. I think all of us care about graduating and making money rather than the design of our programme or whether a lecturer speaks intelligible English.* (R_S1_IE)

The excerpts above demonstrated an adaptive stance from which the students went about their studies. That is, they would first attempt to adapt to the situation at hand or resolve it before taking collective actions. The students said they avoided making things 'a big deal' (R_S2_BS*) as much as possible. Furthermore, joint programmes in general were 'big things beyond [their] control' (R_S4_CS*) and change would never come from a single complaint. Another reason for not taking collective action more often was cultural: 'Maybe we have been conditioned since childhood that teachers are right and it is up to the students to do well.' (R_S3_CS).

The focus group with *BS* students led to a short but insightful discussion on *Red's* rationale for opening joint programmes. As stated above, the students' perception of joint programmes was informed by their experiences being in one; they had no knowledge of how they were set up or of specific programmes. Yet, this did not mean they had no opinion of the set-up of joint programmes. R_S2_BS*, a 4:0 student, was concerned with the fact the results of every course provided by *Red* were null in her degree; instead, only the assignments and exams issued by the partner university in the final year were accounted for, and the 'irony' was that they were marked at home by *Red* lecturers. She consequently found 'no motivation in doing [her] best' with *Red* courses and remarked that it was 'unfair for those who did'. Her sentiment was echoed by other *BS* joint students in the focus group and later by *CS* students in their respective focus group (R_S2_CS*; R_S4_CS*). The configurations around joint programmes made joint students feel their programmes were opened for more commercial than educational purposes:

> *Last week we opened a brand new, marvelous campus in the city centre. The building was bought with my money no doubt.* (R_S2_BS*)

> *There's a lot to gain for both Red and foreign universities. Just look at how much we have to pay even when we are here studying in the same class with the same lecturer as locals, without grades.* (R_S2_CS*)

With regards to *4:0* programmes, some students found them 'borderline selling and buying degrees' (R_S2_BS*; R_S1_CS; R_S1_IE) but admitted that Vietnamese students and parents were complicit by 'chasing an overseas degree to the end and nothing [was] more efficient than getting one without flying away' (R_S1_IE). That said, nearly all students agreed the questionable set-up of joint programmes might be 'worth it in the long run' (R_S3_CS) due to the employability value of Western degrees and access to Western education, so they put up with the feeling that some joint programmes did not reflect their high tuition. In addition, the students said the programmes could not be adjusted anyway because they '[were] already there and decided by *Red* and the partners' (R_S2_BS*). What was striking here was the students were seemingly trying to accommodate and rationalise the practices at *Red* and their own inaction. More specifically, recall in 5.2.3 they praised *Red* for its willingness to listen and change, here they described *Red* in a deterministic manner. However, such rationalisation was understandable considering they had explained they managed to adapt to the issues of joint programmes.

Interestingly, a few students remarked my interview questions were critical and 'if everyone were too strict, many joint programmes would not survive' (R_S2_BS*). Two particular students, however, were critical of joint programmes: R_S1_IE said he wanted to go abroad but did not apply for any joint programmes because 'the idea sound[ed] off', and if he had had the money he would have chosen 'better universities [than *Red's* partners] and stud[ied] full-time overseas'. Somewhat similarly, R_S2_CS* did lots of reading and found only one 'decent British university', the joint programme with which she applied for. Both preferred to keep their opinions to their own since 'being critical could set [them] so apart that [they] would be called pretentious' (R_S1_IE).

### 5.3.3. A transparent area

It would be reasonable to expect lecturers' accounts of joint programmes to be rich because it was inevitable that they taught joint students, who shared the same lectures as local ones during the home stage. This turned out to not be the case as lecturers talked very little about the joint programme strategy.

Most lecturers agreed joint programmes were a selling point for *Red* because they 'satisfied a unique demand [that is] getting an international education without the associated costs' (R_L3_BS) and in turn 'diversified *Red's* offerings to attract a wide range of students' (R_L1_CS). Joint programmes were also a key element to *Red's* international status because they helped create 'links with the outside world [that] an international university must have' (R_L4_BS). However, impact on academic staff was unclear (R_L4_BS), and many lecturers

could not even feel the presence of joint programmes, as figuratively expressed by R_L3_CS: 'To me, they are transparent. I know they are there, but I cannot see them.' They referred to the configuration of their teaching responsibilities and joint programmes as reasons for such perceived transparency:

> *Here we are assigned to teach courses, not programmes. The courses are shared by local and joint students. Sometimes a partner institution requires special pre-requisite courses, but those are few. This is not to mention each faculty has a dedicated academic advisor for joint students. That person knows more than others.* (R_L2_BS)

> *Local and joint students are the treated the same when they are at Red. Without looking at the student number you cannot tell who is who in class* […] *There is no special way for teaching joint students; the content and delivery are exactly the same.* (R_L2_CS)

R_L3_CS, in particular, pointed to the 'lack of communication from the partners' and wished they had provided 'feedback regarding teaching quality when receiving students' so that *Red* lecturers could improve their modules. R_L2_CS likened *Red* lecturers to 'outsourced workers' as they were doing the work supposedly done by foreign institutions: 'I am teaching so that students get a degree from an overseas university.' His was somewhat echoed by other lecturers (R_L1_BS; R_L2_BS; R_L1_CS). Thus, the configurations around joint programmes put lecturers in a position where they were insiders yet outsiders, contributing but hardly perceiving.

The unequal relation between *Red* and the partners was commented on by a few lecturers (R_L2_BS; R_L1_CS). They found it inevitable due to the lack of resources in Vietnamese public universities and the 'sunken land' (R_L1_CS) standing of Vietnamese higher education; these two factors forced Vietnamese universities to find financial solutions in lucrative joint programmes with foreign partners, against whom they had little leverage in negotiation and curriculum design (R_L2_BS; R_L1_CS). The lecturers were, however, optimistic that joint programmes 'meant at least [Vietnamese] teaching was recognised' (R_L2_BS) and might lead to academic cooperation down the road, but this would require 'a push from the leaders' (ibid.).

As a last note, lecturers were not aware of the formal details concerning joint programmes. Therefore, they made sense of the programmes with their daily teaching experiences and, at a broader level, experiences of being an academic in Vietnamese higher education, as can be seen above.

### 5.4. Accreditation: Environmental shock and disconnection

Besides opening joint programmes, *Red* also wanted to internationalise its own local programmes. One way to achieve this was to have them accredited by international bodies. Accreditation was also a means to enhance *Red's* reputation, thus facilitating the establishment of new partnerships and through them new joint programmes: 'One arrow hitting two birds. The VC gets international recognition and reputation while improving *Red's* teaching quality' (personal communication with a *VNUHCM* senior manager). Accreditation was therefore a key area in the corporate strategy:

> *Improve teaching quality to approach regional standards (AUN) and international ones (ABET, AACSB)*
>
> *The objectives of the accreditation strategy are:*
>
> - *Complete and refine programmes, management systems and tools for quality assurances and accreditations*
> - *Raise awareness of quality assurances and accreditations for all staff and students*
> - *Promote internal quality assurance activities to ensure our programmes meet regional and international accreditation standards*
>
> (R_D)

At the time of data collection *Red* had conducted programme-level assessment by *AUN-QA*[33] and was looking towards institution-level assessment in addition to getting its engineering programmes accredited by *ABET*[34].

The accreditation strategy is headed by the *Centre for Quality Assurance*, a functional department, but only to the extent of institutional accreditation. Programme-level accreditation was delegated to the faculties. This section first focuses on the efforts of *CS* dean to get his faculty accredited by *ABET* (5.4.1), followed by the perception of *CS* lecturers towards accreditation in general (5.4.2). Section 5.4.3 will describe how the few students from *BS* and *CS* who were involved in accreditation work thought about accreditation.

### 5.4.1. 'Fighting with bare hands'

*CS* became the first faculty to have an undergraduate programme assessed by *AUN-QA* in 2009, two years ahead of everyone else. The dean of *CS* (R_MM_CS) took great pride in this

[33] ASEAN University Network (AUN), established in 1995, is an intergovernmental organisation in Southeast Asia whose mission is to foster cooperation among universities in the region and provide recommendations on higher education policies to ASEAN countries. One of its main activities is quality assessment, called AUN-QA. There are two levels of AUN-QA: institutional and programme-level, both of which involves self-reporting followed by a review visit.

[34] Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) is an American accrediting agency that assesses quality at either institutional or programme level. HEIs have to pay to be accredited in each of the four ABET categories: applied and natural science, computing, engineering, engineering technology. Accreditation involves self-report followed by a review visit.

and to further their 'leading position in being recognised for quality', he applied for *ABET* accreditation in 2016. Personally, he was a strong believer in such exercise: 'Benchmarks are essential to know where we are internationally so we can reach better standards.' *CS'* application was not its own initiative but a part of an university-wide one devised by the VC; the VC's intention was to have all of *Red's* undergraduate engineering programmes accredited by *ABET* in 2019. Though enthusiastic, R_MM_CS admittedly could not foresee the learning curve and later on an environmental shock that put a halt to *CS'* effort.

It was the first time the dean and most of *CS* staff had encountered something like *ABET* accreditation. They were therefore 'mentally unprepared' for the workload required, but since 'everyone was okay with it' (R_MM_CS) they decided to commit (as shall be seen in 5.4.2, 'being okay' did not necessarily mean an engaged attitude). The challenge was greater for R_MM_CS because he had to coordinate and review all the works prepared for the *ABET* organisation:

> *We were going in blind, like fighting with bare hands. We did AUN before but this is a different thing with different criteria and documentation requirements* […] *It is difficult for me because I have to know what and who to assign work and judge the quality.* (R_MM_CS)

Central management could offer little guidance as 'it [was] their first time [with *ABET*] also, everyone in the same boat' (R_MM_CS). Faced with such a 'daunting task' (ibid.), the dean decided the best first step was to learn as much as possible.

*Red* provided abundant information on training opportunities and encouraged the faculties to attend, including workshops by the *ABET* organisation or fieldtrips to one *ABET*-accredited university in Saigon. R_MM_CS actively made use of these, sending his staff or himself going to them, and then let everyone share what they had learned during faculty meetings. *Red* was also assigned a consultant by *ABET* – a Vietnamese American professor, thanks to whom the dean was able to adopt a 'learn as you go' (ibid.) approach where he sought iterative feedback on self-reports. On top of this, the dean turned to his own personal network for help:

> *My close friend is a middle manager at* [another university that had been ABET-accredited]. *He showed me what they did over there, which is very illuminating. I sometimes asked for feedback and advice. I am lucky to have a forerunner as guide.* (R_MM_CS)

He considered this personal resource a 'special advantage' for *CS* which, combined with the more formal training, enabled him and *CS* staff to quickly grasp the innerworkings of *ABET*. Although progress was slow due to technical issues such as lack of data or time, *CS* was 'steadily moving towards accreditation' (R_MM_CS).

*CS' ABET* aspiration, however, was put at risk by a new regulation on programme naming. At the time of data collection the faculty had two undergraduate programmes: a *Bachelor in Computer Science* and a *Bachelor in Information Technology*. The former was further broken down into two specialisations: *Network Engineering* or *Hardware Engineering*, which would be written onto the final degree. For instance, a student choosing the *Network Engineering* specialisation would graduate with a degree called *Bachelor in Computer Science with Network Engineering*. Both specialisations of the *Bachelor in Computer Science* were registered as two separate programmes for *ABET* accreditation. Complications arose when *VNUHCM* announced that specialisations should no longer be written onto a degree, which meant students taking either *Network Engineering* or *Hardware Engineering* would graduate with the same *Bachelor in Computer Science* degree. Because the degree no longer had the word 'engineering' on it, *CS* was disqualified from getting the *ABET* accreditation, which was for engineering programmes. The sudden setback came as a surprise to the faculty and particularly R_MM_CS, who had no choice but to withdraw his application.

Nonetheless, the dean came up with a solution shortly afterwards:

> *I will break the Computer Science programme up into two new ones with new names, with the word 'engineering' written in of course. The problem is I cannot just give any name to my liking; it has to be recognised by the Ministry of Education and Training*[35]*. For a start, there is no network engineering in their list, so I need to find something that is already there and that network engineering can fit in.* (R_MM_CS)

If the name change was successful, *CS* would get back on track to join the other faculties when *ABET* would visit *Red* to do on-site assessment. The dean added if there was no suitable name in the *Ministry's* list, he would have to apply for *Networking Engineering* to be recognised and given a programme code, which he was trying to avoid: 'We will miss this opportunity for accreditation. It takes two years for a new programme to be recognised, not to mention all the paperwork.' (R_MM_CS). It appeared R_MM_CS was familiar with higher education legislation in Vietnam and drew on it to carry out the present strategic move. He also said he had not paid much attention to 'such complicated things' (ibid.) before the present regulation change. As of the time of writing, the dean is in dialogue with the top management over changing the name of *CS' Bachelor in Computer Science*.

Notably, R_MM_CS had never paid attention to accreditation until the *ABET* initiative. Indeed, he paid little attention to strategic matters in general and had little knowledge of the corporate strategy. He saw his own role as 'to realise ideas from top management' (R_MM_CS) and he trusted the latter would be the most suitable persons to handle anything

[35] The Ministry of Education and Training compiles a list of recognised disciplines, each assigned a unique code. All programmes from Vietnamese universities (private and public) must be registered with an appropriate code. If an institution wants to open a programme in an unrecognised discipline, it has to apply for a new code and undergo a two-year trial period after which the Ministry decides if the programme and discipline are legitimate.

strategic. However, he believed that he still had a strong grasp of *Red's* corporate strategy thanks to his years working at *Red*, first as a lecturer and then dean of *CS*:

> [I understand the corporate strategy] *from meetings with the VC; you can connect his ideas and figure out the whole, and I think he has a very good strategy* […] *I used to be a lecturers for several years before this post, and just by working here I got a sense of how things were* […] *Through dean duties I have formed a better view of the environment here.* (R_MM_CS)

He added that while written, formal strategies were important, what was actually done and to be done on the ground 'with the hand and heart' mattered more (R_MM_CS). Thus, the dean had a very hands-on philosophy to management in that he would spring first into action to complete his duties and 'work and play with [the staff] closely', which he believed 'create[d] confidence in leadership and motivation.' On top of this, when relaying top management's decisions, he tried to rephrase and 'translate [them] into what [needed] to be done' while omitting what he deemed unnecessary. It can be seen above that R_MM_CS' hands-on style shaped his role in the *ABET* initiative: Besides coordinating, he engaged with the work himself by going to training events, sharing what he had learned during faculty meetings, talking to the *ABET* consultant and his friend about *CS'* preparations.

### 5.4.2. Involved yet disconnected

Though thoroughly involved in the process, *CS* lecturers appeared disconnected with the *ABET* initiative or rather accreditation as a whole. To begin with, it fell upon *CS* lecturers themselves to understand requirements from accrediting bodies like *AUN-QA* or *ABET* and then do all the work from gathering data to writing up reports for these bodies. In other words, they were heavily involved from start to finish. This was because *CS* (or *Red* for that matter) did not have an information system to gather, store and publish all of its information for accreditation, neither did it possess dedicated manpower for such task.

Yet, the lecturers' perception was one of uninvolvement. While most of the lecturers in this study agreed an accredited status was beneficial to *CS* and *Red*, 'enhancing [*CS and Red's*] reputation and image' (R_L1_CS), they felt the impact on lecturers such as themselves was vague:

> *The good thing is we have to be transparent, and this is one of the very few public universities where you can easily find syllabi, course descriptions, all in English. I have yet to see it change my teaching or research though.* (R_L2_CS)

> *The badges are more for marketing purposes, and that's good for the whole university. It does not affect me except the extra workload. I still teach the same curriculum and the faculty runs the same way.* (R_L3_CS)

In addition, the labour associated with accreditation was not very meaningful in that it was 'just work for the university' rather than something they were 'invested in' like a research

project (R_L3_CS). Such disconnect was also mentioned by *CS* dean, who implied that the lack of impact resulted from how accreditation was carried out:

> *At the moment we are writing papers for accrediting bodies more than using the criteria to develop ourselves. Accreditation is like an award, not a guide. For me, what should be done instead is all the staff have to think ABET, speak ABET, write ABET so that the programmes we design are already ABET quality.* (R_MM_CS)

When asked, he said any accreditation-related work was counted as service[36] and not a special task in itself. Moreover, there had not been any awareness-raising activity on quality assurances and accreditations for lecturers, as written in the corporate strategy. Thus, the lecturer's feelings of disconnect likely stemmed from the perceived lack of impact and poor internal communication.

Nonetheless, there was one interesting side effect brought by accreditation, particularly the *ABET* initiative. A requirement from both *AUN-QA* and *ABET* is that a higher education institution should have clear corporate strategies and that the strategies should be reflected in all aspects of its organisation. In order to prepare reports for accrediting bodies, therefore, *CS* lecturers had to find information and write about *Red's* corporate strategy and then follow with an analysis of how a certain organisational aspect of *CS* (e.g. teaching, research, human resources) reflected and was supported by the strategy (R_L3_CS). In fact, they were provided with the formal corporate strategy whenever there was an accreditation round, the information from which was supplemented with 'personal experiences […] gained from many years of working [at *CS*]' (R_L2_CS). Thanks to the *ABET* initiative, *CS* lecturers became aware of *Red's* corporate strategy and actually welcomed the insights:

> *Reading the vision and mission I knew that I chose the right place to work.* (R_L1_CS)

> *It is good to know about our strategic directions though I do not have the need to. It feels good to know you are part of a community heading somewhere.* (R_L3_CS)

However, apart from this slight morale boost *CS* lecturers mentioned nothing else. They added what was written in the corporate strategy 'bore no surprise' because they had 'already witnessed it in reality' (R_L2_CS), so reading formal strategic documents mostly served to confirm their observation. Furthermore, they said what was 'spoken and done by top management' mattered more to how they perceived *Red*, and they paid more attention to what the dean told them as it 'was closer and more relevant' (R_L1_CS). This showed a lack of interest in the formal corporate strategy, which if not for accreditation they would not have been in a position to know.

[36] *Red's* lecturers had three contractual responsibilities: teaching, research, service.

### 5.4.3. The chosen few

The students in this study, both from *BS* and *CS*, were hardly aware of *Red's* accreditation and unsurprisingly not involved in any accreditation activity. There were, however, two exceptions. The first was R_S1_BS, who volunteered to be a recruitment assistant. Her job involved helping organise open days and answer prospective students' enquiries both during and outside open days. To this end, she was briefed about *Red's* 'sellling points' (R_S1_BS) and required to memorise them. Some of the selling points she recalled during interview were actually part of the 11 internationalisation strategies presented at the start of this chapter (5.1), and among them was accreditation. However, the extent of her knowledge was the list of accreditations *Red* had achieved (e.g. AUN-QA). She did not know the details of these accreditations or how accreditation rounds were conducted.

The other student was R_S1_CS, who was a member of the *Youth Organisation* branch in his faculty. His exact responsibilities were numerous and varied over time, but under the umbrella of (a) organising students' events, (a) monitoring student societies and (c) implementing top management's student policies at faculty-level. In addition, he sometimes assisted *CS* lecturers with conferences and participated in one-off duties for the faculty. One of these one-off duties was to sit for an interview with an accrediting body, thanks to which he knew what accreditation was and what role students played in an accreditation round. However, he could not remember the name of the accrediting body and did not know the procedures that *CS* had to follow when to attain an award from that body. He said that he was 'just follow[ing] orders' and was not interested in accreditation because it was not relevant to his regular responsibilities in *Youth Organisation* or his studies.

The two students' accounts of accreditation, while scant, were of value to this study. On the one hand, they indicated that *Red* students could gain access to strategic information that normally was beyond them if they were in certain organisational positions. This ties back to R_S4_CS in 5.2.2, who inadvertently overheard institutional matters that were reserved for managers when he worked part time as an IT assistant for administrative offices. On the other, they further showed that *Red* students were not concerned with or, for most, aware of strategic matters like internationalisation strategies, so what they knew of them (accreditation in this case) came from the tasks and experiences brought about by their role in the university.

## 5.5. Chapter conclusion: Non-leaders' sensemaking, centralisation, social media and vantage points

This chapter has presented the second case study of *Red* by first detailing its institutional profile and 11 internationalisation strategies and them zooming in on three notable

strategies, namely EMI, joint programmes and accreditation. This section recaptures the six most significant findings of this case study.

First, *Red* did not have a dedicated internationalisation component strategy. Its 11 internationalisation strategies were integrated and scattered across the 11 component strategies (5.1.2). This is not to be confused with *Blue's* approach in which every component strategy *was* an internationalisation strategy. Neither did *Red* have a clear conceptualisation of internationalisation like *Blue*, and its internationalisation strategies were instead based on observations of other universities in Vietnam and abroad. Among the 11 strategies, EMI was the most important; in fact, EMI was core to *Red's* identity, and the HEI took pride in being 'the first Vietnamese university to wholly teach in English' (R_TM). In fact, *Red* was very active in communicating and branding its international aspects.

Second, even though the participants talked about their own experience at *Red*, their personal accounts illustrated how strategies were managed at the university. Decisions were made centrally by top management, particularly the VC, and the role of non-leaders was to execute those decisions, so they had little if any say in strategy making. However, the VC was also engaged with the frontline by paying attention to what students said on social media. By reading, commenting on posts on *Red Social* and following up with actions, he had empowered students to have strategic impact. The best example was the *langcen* debacle (5.2.3), where joint students' complaints on social media were taken seriously and led to a significant change in how the EMI strategy was implemented for them. The role of institutional leadership and social media in empowering students was arguably the most interesting finding from *Red*.

Third, despite centralisation and their lack of say in what internationalisation strategies were, *Red* non-leaders were able to shape the outcomes of the strategies in accordance with their sensemaking, and in rare cases they might induce strategic adjustments. For example, *Red* lecturers switched to Vietnamese when students showed confusion or in certain circumstances like laboratory sessions (R_L1_CS), even though officially it was required all teaching be done in English. Indeed, this practice characterised how the EMI strategy was *de facto* realised on the ground, evident by its mention by nearly all *Red* lecturers and students in this study. The language switch emerged out of lecturers' observation that *Red* students were not competent enough in English for EMI; this is not to mention that, as suggested by students, the lecturers' own English could be poor. Another example is how *Red* joint students' sensemaking around *langcen* courses eventually led to the adjustment of the EMI strategy, as mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Fourth, *Red* deans played a rather passive role with regards to internationalisation strategies. Their job was simply to keep business as usual and implement decisions from the top. As a

result, they felt no necessity to understand any strategies at all or to devise strategic initiatives; their focus was instead placed on the daily administrative tasks and occasional orders from the top. This did not mean, however, that no sensemaking of internationalisation strategies took place. Instead of reading strategic documents, *Red* deans made sense of internationalisation strategies by noticing any information coming their way when fulfilling their duties. For example, R_MM_CS made sense of the accreditation strategy via all the work to get his faculty accredited by *ABET* (5.4.1); he had had little if any knowledge of *Red's* accreditation strategy until then.

Fifth, the accounts of *Red* lecturers gave the impression of themselves as compliant frontliners of the university. However, they were also flexible and could compromise a strategy if the situation called for it (5.2.2). They were not concerned with strategic matters or involved in strategy making, so their understanding of *Red's* internationalisation strategies came from the daily, mundane reality of teaching, doing research and the odd one-off duties.

Lastly, *Red* students demonstrated that social media could be used as a tool for strategic change and that certain vantage points could provide them with normally inaccessible strategic information. On the one hand, the students used the facebook community *Red Social* as a venue for collective sensemaking and communication with the VC, who was a frequent reader of *Red Social*. It was *Red Social* that enabled the students to effect change at the university, a prime example of which was removing *langcen* courses as a requirement for joint students. On the other hand, it was possible for *Red* students to acquire formal strategic information, which was normally inaccessible to them, if they were placed in certain positions, such as working part-time with administrative offices or being involved in faculty activities (5.2.2, 5.4.3). Nonetheless, these students were few, and they showed little interest in the strategic information they had access to. Therefore, their sense of internationalisation strategies, as well as that of other *Red* students, instead came from the tasks and experiences of their roles. These tasks and experiences were often as simple as attending lectures and paying attention to what was taught, but could tell the students a lot about an internationalisation strategy. For instance, one could make sense of the effectiveness of the EMI strategy by listening to his/her lecturers' spoken English.

# CHAPTER 6: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The last two chapters have respectively presented the case studies of *Blue* and *Red*. More specifically, their institutional profiles and internationalisation strategies were detailed, followed by empirical findings of how some of these strategies were made sense of by non-leaders. In the end, the case studies have shown that the outcomes of *Blue* and *Red*'s internationalisation strategies, sometimes the strategies themselves, were shaped by the sensemaking of their deans, lecturers and students. However, it is difficult to discern the manner in which sensemaking was done by each non-leader group, which is necessary for answering my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* This is understandable since Chapter 4 and 5 focus on presenting coherent narratives around *Blue* and *Red*'s internationalisation strategies and thus place the three non-leaders together, blurring the boundaries between them. Nonetheless, the data does suggest distinction to the sensemaking of deans, lecturers and students within and across cases (e.g. the sensemaking of *Blue* deans was different from that of *Blue* lecturers and *Red* deans). For these reasons, it is now necessary to tease out the sensemaking features of each non-leader group at *Blue* and *Red*.

Drawing on the rich data in Chapter 4 and 5, Chapter 6 will compare how the internationalisation strategies of *Blue* and *Red* were made sense of by each group of non-leaders across the two universities. Each section below compiles the accounts of one non-leader group (deans, lecturers, students) from *Blue* and *Red* and lays them side by side so that cross-case themes and patterns in the group's sensemaking may emerge. At the end of the chapter, I will highlight key differences between groups. The findings of Chapter 6 will be the direct basis for theoretical discussion and answering my research question in Chapter 7. This chapter, however, will not repeat in full the data from the previous two but instead sums it up in order to avoid needless repetition.

On top of this, Chapter 6 will address in better depth the finding that most participants' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was embedded within sensemaking of their mundane role responsibilities, which was introduced in 4.1.2. In brief, internationalisation was rarely a conscious sensemaking subject for deans, lecturers and students from both *Blue* and *Red*. Instead, their concern was the tasks and experiences associated with their respective roles, through which they developed an understanding of any related internationalisation strategies. For example, *Red* students were more concerned with understanding their lectures than the EMI strategy, and yet it was through attending lecturers that they discovered EMI was beyond the capabilities of some lecturers and peers. While such embeddedness was noted in nearly every section of Chapter 4 and 5 (including the chapter conclusions), it will be treated with more attention in Chapter 6. To this end, Chapter 6 will pull in additional data that highlights (a) how the participants made sense of their roles and (b) how, through role sensemaking, they were able to make sense of internationalisation strategies.

With regards to said additional data, there are two points I wish to emphasise. First, this additional data only serves to enrich the empirical findings (and thus theoretical discussion later on) around the sensemaking of internationalisation strategies. It does not shift my focus from sensemaking of internationalisation strategies to sensemaking of role. Indeed, it has been a challenge to write about role sensemaking without placing it in the spotlight, but it is crucial to tackle this challenge in order to do the data full justice. Second, the new data pertains to and fleshes out what has already been reported; it does not introduce any issues not mentioned in Chapter 4 and 5. For example, Section 5.2.1 and 5.3.2 reported why *Red* students chose the university for its EMI and joint programmes. This meant that the students had already started making sense of *Red's* internationalisation strategies before becoming a student. Section 6.4.4 of this chapter will add data to explore such early sensemaking.

In brief, Chapter 6 serves a dual purpose: On the one hand, it presents the comparative analysis of *Blue* and *Red* so that a more useful empirical basis can be formed for discussion. On the other hand, it enriches this empirical basis by adding data about the embeddedness of internationalisation-strategy sensemaking within role sensemaking.

Chapter 6 contains three sections, each corresponding to one university non-leader group from *Blue* and *Red*. The chapter starts with deans (6.1), followed by lecturers (6.2) and ends with students (6.3).

## 6.1. Deans

A comparison of *Blue* and *Red* deans' accounts has revealed three key areas around which cross-case themes and patterns have emerged. The first is the impact of decision-making power (or lack of) on their internationalisation-strategy sensemaking and on how it is embedded in role sensemaking, which will be described in 6.1.1 and 6.1.2. The second is their ways of thinking about higher education and management, elaborated in 6.1.3. The third and last area is their utilisation of information and actions during sensemaking; this will be presented in 6.1.4.

### 6.1.1. Proactiveness, agency and role

Put together, the accounts from *Blue* and *Red* deans showed an immediate difference: *Blue* deans were markedly more proactive than their *Red* counterparts in making sense of internationalisation strategies, or more accurately all strategies. Both the *Blue* deans involved in this study, B_MM_EC from *Economics and Commerce* and B_MM_LC from *Language and Culture*, were proactive in making sense of *Blue's* corporate strategy and the conditions of their faculties (4.3.1, 4.3.5, 4.4.1). B_MM_LC, for one, often 'went down to lecture halls' to see

if there were any issues and find a way to fix them, sometimes fixing an issue himself. This was not to mention his close relations with students as he invited them for lunch so that he could listen to what happened at the frontline. By contrast, *Red* deans leaned towards a more passive, reactionary way of sensemaking in which they took in strategic information as it appeared to them, rather than seeking it out. This was best evident by the explanation of R_MM_CS from *Computer Science* about how he had developed an understanding of *Red's* corporate strategy:

> [I understand the corporate strategy] *from meetings with the VC; you can connect his ideas and figure out the whole, and I think he has a very good strategy* […] *I used to be a lecturers for several years before this post, and just by working here I got a sense of how things were* […] *Through dean duties I have formed a better view of the environment here.* (5.4.1)

R_MM1_BS, deputy dean of *Business School*, had a similar answer, saying that he just needed to 'pay attention to the surroundings'.

On top of this, *Blue* deans possessed more agency to act upon their understanding of its internationalisation strategies. Both deans had their own strategic initiatives: B_MM_EC with his three research initiatives (*Blue Research Seminar*, the new *research-lecturer* contractual scheme and associated performance evaluation, 4.3.1) and the purchase of *Turnitin* (4.4.1), and B_MM_LC with the advocacy students' club (4.4.1) plus conference trips (4.3.5). By contrast, it was very difficult for *Red* deans to make use of their understanding and devise similar initiatives (5.3.1), as expressed by R_MM1_BS and his superior, R_MM2_BS:

> *Sometimes we come up with ideas benefitting everyone but possess no power to realise them, so we need help from the offices. Most are very helpful, but a few are, how to put it, unenthusiastic. Such instances make us reserved, and whenever we want to propose something we have to think whom it involves and how.* (R_MM1_BS)

> *We don't have faculty strategy here. We almost entirely follow the directions of top management.* (R_MM2_BS)

These differences in sensemaking proactiveness and the agency the deans possessed could be attributed to, as R_MM2_BS said above, their organisational roles as a whole. *Blue* deans played more of a driving role in which they were enabled to put forward a strategic initiative and implement it, while administration was taken care of by deputy deans. By contrast, *Red* deans played more of a following role in which they were tasked with implementation of top-down orders and daily administration. As R_MM1_BS said, this was not to say they did not want to have their own initiatives, but when they did they were discouraged by lack of decision-making power and resource autonomy. The role difference was explicit in quotes by the deans themselves and others:

| | |
|---|---|
| *I hire deans to develop the faculties, not operate them. Operation is the responsibility of deputy deans* […] *B_MM_EC and B_MM_LC perfectly understood this.* (B_TM) | *Unlike Western universities, our governance is central. There is little the faculties could decide by themselves without consulting the offices and getting approved by top management.* (R_MM_ER) |
| *Administration is part of my duties, but the more important thing is to devise a path forward for the faculty.* (B_MM_LC) | *We don't have faculty strategy here. We almost entirely follow the directions of top management.* (R_MM2_BS) |

### 6.1.2. Internationalisation-strategy sensemaking and role sensemaking

The connection of the deans' roles with their sensemaking proactiveness and agency also revealed how their internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was embedded in role sensemaking. This role-embeddedness was easily seen in the case of *Red* deans. As administrators and strategy implementers, they were on the receiving ends of tasks already well-defined by top management, and therefore their concern was to accomplish these tasks without any necessity to know the strategies behind them (R_MM_CS). Indeed, none in this study had read or heard of *Red's* 11 internationalisation strategies (5.1.2), or the corporate strategy. However, they recognised all of the internationalisation strategies that I listed during interview, but as 'existing areas of activity of the faculty' to manage and oversaw rather than 'a strategy' (R_MM_CS). These so-called areas of activity became familiar to the deans through the daily reality on the job: 'Just by working here I got a sense of how things were' (ibid.), or more specifically through

- 'being guided by the predecessor' (R_MM_CS) and learning on the job
- managing internationalisation activities themselves, 'pay[ing] attention to the surroundings [and] interven[ing] in time' (R_MM1_BS)
- having meetings with top management where they were discussed. For example, the accreditation strategy first caught R_MM_CS' attention in a strategic meeting that discussed the VC's intent to attain *ABET* accreditation, which involved *CS*.
- teaching and doing research[37]

This indicated that sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was embedded within *Red* deans' sensemaking of their middle management role. Simply put, by focusing on their middle management responsibilities, *Red* deans also gained an understanding of internationalisation strategies, albeit in the form of activities rather than formal strategies.

The role-embeddedness, however, was more complex with *Blue* deans. To begin with, their job was less about administration and top-down orders but more about the strategic development of their faculties: 'I hire deans to develop the faculties, not operate them.

[37] Deans at *Red* also had to teach and do research.

Operation is the responsibility of deputy deans.' (B_TM). As strategy drivers, *Blue* deans therefore had to figure out what their role actually meant; that is, which component strategy(ies) (4.2.1) could be pushed in their faculties. To this end, they drew on various sources of information, including the whole corporate strategy (with particular focus on internationalisation strategies, for the purpose of this study), their personal and academic background, observation of faculty activities; this is not to mention each had his own beliefs of what higher education should be. The result was a role they set for themselves. For instance, before his appointment, B_MM_EC read the corporate strategy and had a short candidacy period when he 'work[ed] with full responsibilities of a dean while getting to know the faculty' (B_TM). He observed that while research was a strategic emphasis, it was 'way beyond what the staff were capable of' (ibid.). In addition, he himself was a strong believer in research and had had a professional 'crisis' (B_MM_EC) with it early in his career. Thus, the dean made it his goal to build research capacity for his staff, and to this end he came up with the three initiatives: *Blue Research Seminar*, the *research-lecturer* contractual scheme and new performance evaluation (5.3.1).

In this way, *Blue* deans' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was not embedded and *resulting from* sensemaking of role, but overlapped and *resulted in* the latter. Simply put, *Blue* deans' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking *was* role sensemaking. Thus, the meaning they gave to internationalisation strategies shaped their future responsibilities as dean. The only caveat was that they had to choose internationalisation as the strategic area to push in their faculties, which was the case with both *Blue* deans in this study.

*Blue* deans' mode of sensemaking was marked by two features, distinct from that of *Red* deans'. First, to re-iterate 6.2.1, they were more proactive than *Red* deans since they sought out information rather than just being on the job and noticing what came their way. The second key difference was that while *Red* deans only recognised internationalisation strategies in the form of 'areas of activity' (R_MM_CS), *Blue* deans were formally aware of their internationalisation strategies, as well as of *Blue's* corporate strategy. However, it should be noted that this formal awareness came about partly thanks to the efforts of *Blue* VC, who took care to provide her deans with formal strategic information via documents and briefings. Another point to note was *Blue* deans, like their *Red* counterparts, also looked to the reality on the ground to make sense of internationalisation strategies, in supplementation to formal strategic information. For instance, during his candidacy B_MM_EC noticed that despite research being written into the corporate strategy, there was a lack of research activity and capacity among EC staff.

### 6.1.3. Beliefs about universities and management

Another difference between the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of *Blue* and *Red* deans was their way of thinking about or framing internationalisation strategies (or *schema*

for short, in keeping with sensemaking theory). In the case of *Blue* deans, sensemaking was shaped by their beliefs about what a university should be, so they chose to drive the strategies that best reflected this perceived ideal. For B_MM_EC, research was essential to the identity of universities and university lecturers, so upon seeing the weak state of research in *EC* he decided his first office term should revolve around promoting research and building research capacity for staff (4.3.1). B_MM_LC also considered research important, but his priority was academic integrity, hence the establishment of a students' club that advocated for education ethics (4.4.1). Moreover, these beliefs were in turn shaped by their previous experiences of higher education outside Vietnam, which they brought back and applied to *Blue*. B_MM_LC himself said his PhD in the US 'opened [his] eyes to the values of a university'. This indicated the possibility of institutional influences at the macro, field level being imparted onto *Blue* deans' schemas. As shall be seen below, there were strong signs of institutional forces, at both meso (organisational) and macro (field, societal) levels, in the way the *Blue* and *Red* deans, lecturers and students framed internationalisation strategies. This is a key issue to be discussed in Chapter 7.

By contrast, *Red* deans' schemas about internationalisation strategies were, roughly speaking, much more practical. They hardly mentioned their beliefs about higher education, but spoke at length about was their way of managing the implementation of internationalisation strategies in their faculties:

> *Teaching in English is natural for us* […] *Usually there is nothing to do with it, but if on the odd occasion I see feedback about a lecturer speaking too much Vietnamese or too bad English, I might have to talk to that person.* (R_MM1_BS)

> *The first thing I did* [with the *ABET* initiative] *was to announce it in our next meeting and discuss how to tackle the job* […] *I got down to work with the brothers and sisters.* (R_MM_CS)

They did, however, state their support for *Red's* choice of strategies, which they found was fitting for a university aspiring to be international like *Red*. This suggested that as an organisation *Red* had a certain degree of institutional influence over *Red* deans' schemas:

> *To me EMI is a normal and necessary thing* [for us] *to become international. And it sets up apart from other Vietnamese universities* […] *benefits students, giving them an edge once they graduate.* (R_MM1_BS)

With that said, it can be seen that personal management style, rather than beliefs about higher education, was the lens through which *Red* deans made sense of internationalisation strategies. This was rather understandable considering their internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was embedded in role sensemaking, as demonstrated in the last section. I wish to note that *Blue* deans also framed internationalisation strategies within their management style when they tried to implement their own initiatives. For example, B_MM_EC preferred informal communication, which he used to convince various stakeholders of his research initiatives (4.3.2). He told *EC* staff stories of his own academic career, the early days of which

were marked with a 'professional crisis' where he was almost dismissed for lack of research. In addition, he had daily chat with another dean sitting across him in the office, during which he mentioned what he had done in *EC*; the latter eventually adopted his new contractual scheme and performance evaluation.

As a side note, each dean in this study had a distinct management style:

- B_MM_EC liked managing in an informal way. He relied on informal communication like story telling, small chat to convince other stakeholders of his ideas. He disliked having 'to sit down and read something official'.
- B_MM_LC stood out for his hands-on style and presence at the frontline. The dean 'went down to lecture halls' to see if there were any issues and find a way to fix them, sometimes fixing an issue himself. He also actively engaged in frontline activities, especially those that were part of his initiatives.
- R_MM1_BS took more of a backseat (possibly because he was a deputy dean). He kept business 'where [it] should be' and only intervened when something required.
- R_MM_CS led by example. He would spring first into action to complete his duties as a lecturer and dean, which he believed 'create[d] confidence in leadership and motivation'. He also set clear deadlines and upheld them strictly.

### 6.1.4. Information sources and frontline engagement

Despite the above differences, there were two common features in *Blue* and *Red* deans' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies. The first was the flexible use of various sources of information for sensemaking, including those that were external to the universities and yet essential to making sense of their internationalisation strategies. This flexibility was demonstrated by R_MM_CS when he had to get his faculty accredited by *ABET* (5.4.1). First time handling such a task, the dean decided to learn as much as he can by going to *ABET* workshops and asking his friend in another university, who had experienced *ABET*, for information and feedback on *CS'* preparations. When *CS'* efforts were suddenly halted by a new regulation on degree naming, he drew upon the list of recognised disciplines by *the Ministry of Education and Training* in an attempt to rename *CS'* programmes to satisfy both said regulation and *ABET's* requirements. A minor yet interesting quirk was that *Blue* and *Red* deans tended to attribute difficulties to extra-organisational facts like low aware of plagiarism in Vietnamese education (B_MM_EC, 4.4.2) or ineffective English teaching in schools (R_MM_CS, 5.2.2).

Secondly, all of the deans engaged with the frontline and executed their own ideas. B_MM_EC himself organised the *Blue Research Seminars* and taught research methodology there, and he conducted and published a small research project with a few members of staff. B_MM_LC, by comparison, made a point of managing hands-on, and he was often present in activities around campus, especially those that were part of his initiatives. Also a hands-on

manager, R_MM_CS alternately attended *ABET* training workshops with his staff and shared what he learned later on during faculty meetings. R_MM1_BS would personally tend to students when they had problems requesting a semester off to go on exchange. *Blue* and *Red* deans gave a few reasons for engaging in frontline activities, such as to generate trust in leadership (R_MM_CS) and show staff that they were important and appreciated (B_MM_LC; R_MM1_BS). One reason shared by all of them was that the frontline provided the most accurate situation report and feedback on their ideas and more generally management style:

| | |
|---|---|
| *I knew whether research was working by looking at participation in Blue Research Seminars. Not everyone there went on to do research, but I hoped they at least learned something.* (B_MM_EC) | *I always observe and keep track so that I intervene in time if necessary.* (R_MM1_BS) |
| *I went down to the lecture halls and found all sorts of equipment lacking, floor uncleaned. I took a broom and cleaned it myself* […] *The campus provides the most raw and real picture.* (B_MM_LC) | *You should not be detached from your staff. If you work and play with them closely you will know their morale, difficulties, or if there is problems with the computers* […] *You also see if they are with you.* (R_MM_CS) |

Besides feedback, the frontline could inspire new ideas, especially for strategy drivers. Here B_MM_EC and his *Turnitin* initiative (4.4.1) provide an excellent example because his decision to purchase *Turnitin* was not planned beforehand but rather inspired by a conversation with a librarian. He then tried the software in *EC* and the ensuing success provided feedback for him to introduce it to top management for an institution-wide implementation. The approval from top management and their decision to promote it to other higher education institutions in Vietnam were further feedback that motivated him to negotiate with *Turnitin* to become their country agent.

### 6.1.5. Summary of deans' sensemaking

To sum up, *Blue* and *Red* deans had quite different sensemaking patterns depending on their role and management style, but there were also some similarities. As strategic drivers, *Blue* deans had to decide on a strategic area to push in their faculties (internationalisation in this study) and therefore were more proactive in seeking out information about specific strategies, both from briefings and strategic documents provided by top management or from observations of their faculties. What they made sense of internationalisation strategies then shaped what they would do as dean in the university. *Red* deans, by contrast, were strategic implementers whose role was to implement top-down orders and tend to daily administration. They were not concerned with strategic matters, including internationalisation, and only recognised them as specific areas of activity they were responsible for managing. However, it was through these activities that they developed an understanding of any related internationalisation strategies. Therefore, it can be argued that

*Red* deans' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was embedded within sensemaking of role, whereas *Blue* deans' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was role sensemaking itself.

In addition to role, individual management styles and beliefs about universities also shaped deans' view of internationalisation strategies by providing a frame or schema. This schema, moreover, could be influenced by institutional forces at the meso or macro levels. Nonetheless, the deans were similarly actively engaged in frontline activities to execute their own ideas and gather feedback or to find inspirations.

With all that said, the impact of *Blue* and *Red* deans' sensemaking on the internationalisation strategies of their universities was clear. All deans heavily relied on their schema, in combination with any strategic information and resources available to them, to implement a strategy (*Red* deans) or develop it (*Blue* deans). Thus, the deans left their own impressions on the internationalisation of their universities. Take B_MM_EC and B_MM_LC for example, while both chose Blue's research strategy to develop, the former created a new performance evaluation for lecturers, and the latter organised conference trips that doubled as vacation for lecturers. The two deans' decisions stemmed from their schemas: B_MM_EC felt that research should be integral to a lecturer's work and had familiarity with research-based performance evaluation in his previous institution. By comparison, B_MM_LC was an avid traveller and believed that lecturers must first be exposed to scholarship of their fields before learning about research.

## 6.2. Lecturers

Unlike deans', the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of *Blue* and *Red* lecturers was more similar than not. Comparative analysis has revealed two main areas of similarities, within which individual differences might sometimes occur. First, the lecturers' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was clearly embedded in role sensemaking and therefore tied to their daily, mundane work of teaching and research; this will be the focus of Section 6.2.1. Second, the meaning that *Blue* and *Red* lecturers attached to internationalisation strategies was shaped by their self interests but constrained by workplace politics and their mental image of their respective universities; Section 6.2.2 will look at this area.

### 6.2.1. Work and internationalisation strategies

Aggregated accounts from *Blue* and *Red* lecturers immediately pointed to a commonality: Their sensemaking of internationalisation strategies and indeed all strategic matters was tied their daily, mundane work. To start with, institutional strategic matters were not the lecturers' concern, nor did they have much access to strategic information; the only exception was R_L2_BS, who was involved in strategy formulation at *Red* thanks to his seniority. A common

explanation given was that they felt no necessity or responsibility to engage with strategic matters, with other reasons being lack of authority over them or trust in top management:

| | |
|---|---|
| *I think the VC's vision is excellent and we all trust her leadership. On our side we do the best with teaching and research.* (B_L1_EC) | *A few years ago I was invited to an institution-wide meeting between the executive and long-standing staff. They wanted input for the new corporate strategy* […] *Red was much younger back then, and the VC was newly appointed.* (R_L2_BS) |
| *I never care about strategy or long term plan or direction. Why should I? It isn't part of my job and I have no authority.* (B_L3_EC) | *Strategy is a concern for the top. They have to decide where everyone is heading. We cannot do that.* (R_L1_CS) |
| *I'm more engaged with the faculty than the university. We meet sometimes to discuss faculty matters, but not the university's strategy.* (B_L2_LC) | *Sometimes people complain about certain things like computers breaking down, but not many care about big things like strategy.* (R_L2_CS) |

Instead, the lecturers were concerned with everyday teaching responsibilities (B_L1_LC), publication quotas (R_L4_BS), career development (R_L2_CS) and salary (B_L3_EC), so their sensemaking was directed at fulfilling their role within the universities and their own aspirations. Yet, thanks to these banal but essential aspects of their work they were able to engage in the *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies. For instance, *Red* lecturers daily engaged in its EMI strategy (5.2) when they delivered lectures in English. Each instance of engagement (e.g. one lecture) provided *Blue* and *Red* lecturers with evidence about relevant internationalisation strategies, and over time the evidence accumulated and enabled them to notice the patterns in how their universities operated with regards to these strategies. Continuing the last example, each lecture showed *Red* lecturers whether the students could learn in English or whether they themselves could comfortably teach in English. Moreover, each lecture with a different cohort would let them compare the English competence across intakes/cohorts and thus the effectiveness of recruitment each year. Over time, *Red* lecturers could evaluate if the EMI strategy worked or not, even when they did not consciously make sense of it – their sensemaking simply revolved around delivering lectures, which was part of their roles.

Thus, it can be concluded that *Blue* and *Red* lecturers' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was embedded in sensemaking of their roles. This made them remarkably similar to *Red* deans (see 6.1.2 above), who also made sense of internationalisation strategies through the mundane, daily reality of their job. One small difference, however, was that the lecturers' understanding of internationalisation strategies emerged in a subtler, more gradual way than *Red* deans'. This was frequently suggested in the data:

> *It's hard to say when you understand the institution. You just understand it after some time.* (B_L2_EC)
>
> *You just need to work to have a feel of this university, pick up information here and there when having a problem.* (R_L3_CS)

In comparison, *Red* deans said:

> [I understand the corporate strategy] *from meetings with the VC; you can connect his ideas and figure out the whole, and I think he has a very good strategy* […] *I used to be a lecturers for several years before this post, and just by working here I got a sense of how things were* […] *Through dean duties I have formed a better view of the environment here.* (R_MM_CS)
>
> [I understand the corporate strategy] *through documents, meetings, announcements by top management* […] *You just need to pay attention to the surroundings […] I always observe and keep track.* (R_MM1_BS)

It can be seen that there were situations (e.g. meetings with the VC) where *Red* deans were made aware of internationalisation strategies. By contrast, *Blue* and *Red* lecturers did not pay attention to anything beyond their contractual duties (mostly teaching), and although strategic information was sometimes relayed to them by their deans, these instances were recalled as rare. Furthermore, any strategic information they received was probably fragmented; this was best evident by R_MM_CS, who said he only relayed information he deemed relevant to the staff or transformed this information into specific tasks first and then delegated them to the latter. Therefore, *Blue* and *Red* lecturers' understanding of internationalisation strategies was almost entirely developed from the tasks and experiences they had on a daily basis, making it subtler and more gradual than that of *Red* deans.

Interestingly, there was a particular opportunity, albeit under-utilised, for *Red* lecturers to gain a much more direct understanding of its internationalisation strategies. Many of *Red* lecturers in this study had been tasked with preparing documentations for accreditation bodies, for which they were provided with the corporate strategy, faculty-level reports and the curriculum of the programmes in their faculties. The lecturers recalled that accreditation was the first time they had looked at the corporate strategy and appreciated the opportunity to gain deeper insights into *Red*. A few even felt a morale boost upon seeing the alignment between the vision, mission and themselves (e.g. R_L1_CS). With all that said, they had not read too much into the corporate strategy and could remember little content apart from the vision, mission statement and the component strategy related to the subject-matter of their reports. For example, R_L2_CS, who wrote about *CS'* personnel for the *ABET* accreditation, said she only read the vision, mission and human resources strategy (one of the 11 component strategies, see 5.1.1). She added that she could remember little after having done the report.

### 6.2.2. Self-interests, institutional image and significant others

While all *Blue* and *Red* lecturers made sense of internationalisation strategies through work, each drew upon his/her unique schemas and background knowledge. For instance, B_L1_EC held favourable views of her dean's research initiatives since she considered research her passion and key to her academic identity. In contrast, B_L3_EC did not think highly of the initiatives because she saw little personal gain from research (refer back to 4.3.3 for her full rationale). Like B_L3_EC, B_L2_EC saw little utility in research at *Blue*, but she heard from an acquaintance that research could be made compulsory by the *Ministry of Education and Training*, so she had to do research to a certain extent. At *Red*, R_L2_CS thought teaching in English was inevitable, framing it in terms of a feature of his discipline: 'Everything in computer science is in English.' R_L1_BS, in comparison, did not cite his discipline (business administration) as a reason for using English, but simply said that English was necessary 'in today's world'. I wish to note that *Blue* and *Red* lecturers might frame one internationalisation strategy in multiple ways. Continuing the last example, R_L2_CS framed EMI not only within his disciplinary knowledge but also *Red's* branding: 'An international university must be able to speak English'.

Nonetheless, there appeared to be two themes that ran across the schemas of all the lecturers in this study. First, they quite often framed internationalisation strategies within their self-interests, in the form of financial gain, promotion or professional development. A telling example is B_L1_EC: Although pursuing research out of passion, she acknowledged it was the security of her own livelihood that enabled her do so. She also stated that without 'carrot' (incentives) research would always be at the margin of a lecturer's job. Second, *Blue* and *Red* lecturers would try to act out their schemas and carry out any given task as they saw fit, especially when the task itself lacked formalisation or monitoring. For example, *Blue* lecturers framed *Turnitin* in terms of personal utility and *Blue's* teaching culture, which placed heavy emphasis on student feedback. They thus found that being strict about the 20% threshold might result in failing a lot of papers and subsequently receiving bad feedback from students, which affected pay and promotion. As a consequence, they had to compromise the threshold and, in some reported cases, totally disregarded it or even removed correct detections by the software (4.4.3). *Blue* apparently did little to monitor the lecturers' use of *Turnitin*.

Some of *Blue* and *Red* lecturers' schemas, however, were not utilitarian in nature or resulted in such negative outcomes for an internationalisation strategy. First, some schemas could enable the lecturers to reconcile a strategy with the situation on the ground, even when this meant deviating from the intended outcomes of said strategy. This was shown by *Red* lecturers switching to Vietnamese when their students showed confusion; although this was an unintended outcomes of the EMI strategy, it was deemed necessary by the lecturers to ensure teaching quality. Second, some schemas also motivated the lecturers to do more than

intended for a strategy. This was a unique finding from *Blue*, specifically from B_L1_EC (4.3.4). Her passion for research motivated her to do research independently with external funding, and this was even before B_MM_LC's research initiatives. The initiatives only served to bolster her efforts by giving her a platform to bring research into *Blue*: She quickly applied for the new contractual scheme of *research-lecturer*, participated and presented in *Blue Research Seminars* and created her own research group, which was joined by other lecturers such as B_L2_EC.

An interesting finding was that in several instances *Blue* and *Red* themselves became a frame for the lecturers' sensemaking. For example, *Blue's* 'teaching culture' was drawn upon by B_L2_EC, B_L3_EC to frame research. More specifically, B_L2_EC and B_L3_EC talked of their deans' research initiatives and research more generally against the background of (a) the emphasis on student feedback, (b) the dependence of salary and promotion on teaching, and (c) the existing body of staff at *Blue* who had been recruited to teach and not research. At *Red*, the university's branding as an international university was very often referred to as the background for the internationalisation strategies being discussed:

> *A university cannot just call itself international without using English.* (R_L2_BS)
>
> *An international university must have links with the outside world. Joint and exchange programmes help us create those links.* (R_L4_BS)
>
> *Accreditations by international bodies let everyone know that Red is truly of international quality.* (R_L2_CS)

Though no explicit explanation was made by *Red* lecturers, the imprint of *Red's* branding on their schemas appeared to have resulted from *Red's* intensive corporate communication. My campus visits and document analysis clearly showed *Red* was very active in branding itself as being international (refer back to 5.1). Even a cursory look at *Red's* branding would show the consistent presence of the word 'international', and indeed the word was in the university's name and logo. The prevalent use of English during branding activities (e.g. the VC greeted prospective students in English during the open day) and presence of foreigners (e.g. *Red's* partner HEIs were all present during the open day) also contributed. With that said, the table below summarises the major schemas found with lecturers in this study:

*Table 14*. *Blue* and *Red* lecturers' schemas

| ***Blue*** | ***Red*** |
|---|---|
| **Personal utility**, specifically finance and professional development. For example, B_L3_EC and research.<br>***Blue's* teaching culture** – i.e. the lecturer judged a strategy based on its fit with existing teaching-heavy remuneration and promotion structures. For example, B_L3_EC found respecting the *Turnitin* threshold risky to her student feedback.<br>**Passion** For example, B_L1_EC and research | **Personal utility**, specifically finance and professional development. For example, R_L3_CS and joint programmes (he complained about these programmes not benefitting lecturers).<br>**Educational effectiveness** For example, R_L1_CS switched to Vietnamese during laboratory sessions.<br>***Red* being international** – i.e. the lecturer found the strategy a must to justify *Red's* claim of being international. For example, R_L2_BS said a university cannot be international without English.<br>**Disciplinary feature** – i.e. the lecturer found the task was a must in his/her field. For example, R_L2_CS said EMI was a must in computer science. |

Last but not least, *Blue* and *Red* lecturers' sensemaking did not occur in a vacuum but within a social context where micro-politics complicated what meaning could be made. This was expressed candidly by B_L3_EC (4.4.3) as she explained her approach to marking with *Turnitin*. She did not fail the students whose graduation dissertations crossed the 20% plagiarism threshold for fear of (a) their retaliation via student feedback and (b) embarrassment to their supervisors followed by animosity. Politics was also mentioned by R_MM_CS, although he did not refer to any single internationalisation strategy: 'When I started here as a lecturer, I was ambitious and driven to win. That quickly got me nowhere, so I had to learn who's who and play by the rules.' Politics was not widely talked about by the lecturers in this study, but when it was as in B_L3_EC and R_MM_CS' accounts, it appeared a powerful force that shaped sensemaking.

### 6.2.3. Summary of lecturers' sensemaking

In summary, unlike their deans, *Blue* and *Red* lecturers were quite similar in internationalisation-strategy sensemaking. First, their internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was deeply embedded within their role sensemaking. The lecturers were not concerned with or aware of any strategic matters, even in rare situations when they had to write about them (e.g. doing accreditation paperwork). Instead, their attention was centred on the mundane, immediate tasks of their job. However, by making sense of exactly these tasks the lecturers also developed an understanding of the internationalisation strategies that the tasks represented, and this happened subtly and gradually. Second, each lecturer had his/her own schemas, so two lecturers could arrive at different meanings for the same strategy, but in general *Blue* and *Red* lecturers took personal utility into consideration when making sense of any strategies. However, their schemas were also influenced by their mental image of the university they worked at, as well as micro-politics.

Due to its role embeddedness, the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of *Blue* and *Red* lecturers had subtle but still significant impact on the universities' internationalisation strategies. The data has shown that, by making sense of the mundane, immediate tasks of their job, the lecturers created small, concrete outcomes for internationalisation strategies. For example, *Red* lecturers was realising the EMI strategy when preparing a lecture in English. Moreover, the lecturers' sensemaking collectively had the potential to produce common ways of accomplishing tasks that could steer a strategy in unintended directions. This happened when there was tension between the strategies and the lecturers' personal interests (e.g. *Blue* lecturers and *Turnitin*), or between the strategies and the situation on the ground (e.g. *Red* lecturers and EMI). It is also worth noting that sensemaking could lead the lecturers to withdrawn from a task altogether (e.g. B_L3_EC withdrew from all research activity) or undertake an initiative beyond their responsibilities (e.g. B_L1_EC established a research group); such cases, nonetheless, were rare.

## 6.3. Students

As was the case with lecturers, *Blue* and *Red* students shared a lot of commonalities in their sensemaking of internationalisation strategies. First and foremost, students' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was deeply embedded in role sensemaking and therefore inseparable from the routine organisational reality of their studies. This reality, however, existed not only in the physical but also digital world, where social media was extensively used for collective sensemaking. Section 6.3.1 will address the role-embeddedness and role of social media in *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation-strategy sensemaking. Nonetheless, a few students from *Red* showed that role-embeddedness did not necessarily mean they had to rely on the routine tasks and experiences of their studies, or social media, to make sense of internationalisation strategies. By chance or intent, these students found themselves in special positions that afforded them direct strategic information, which gave them a vantage point inaccessible to others; these students will be the focus of Section 6.3.2. Regardless of sources of information, all *Blue* and *Red* students in this study framed internationalisation in a self-interested manner, which will be elaborated in 6.3.3. Finally, the students showed that they hard started to make sense of *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies even before entering the universities; Section 6.3.4 will detail this early start.

### 6.3.1. Studies, social media and internationalisation strategies

At first glance, the accounts from *Blue* and *Red* students have already revealed their lack of interest in internationalisation as strategies:

> *What do you mean by strategy? We are only students.* (B_S3_EC)

> *There's no reason for us to know strategy or plan. We only need to pass modules and graduate.* (R_S2_BS)

*Thanks to you I know a little bit more about Blue. I would never have guessed its* [corporate strategy] *was reflected so well in what we did.* (B_S4_EC, post-interview comment)

*I think most of us keep to our studies. Some protested the board conflict, so maybe they cared about Blue's directions.* (B_S1_LC)

*R_S2_CS and I are part of the Youth Organisation*[38]*. We work closely with institutional leaders to organise events for students, so sometimes we hear about plans. To be honest, I don't think about them much, I just follow orders.* (R_S1_CS)

*I don't know anything about Red's strategy. This is not a students' matter.* (R_S1_IE)

The responses above clearly show that the students felt no necessity in being aware of strategic matters, even when they were involved in university-level activities like R_S1_CS. Instead, they perceived their role as simply involving going to lectures, passing exams and completing their programmes; simply put, studying was the only concern for them. However, it was the ordinary lectures and exams, as well as other activities in their programmes, that reflected the *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies; for example, every lecture at *Red* reflected its EMI strategy. Therefore, by carrying out tasks in order to progress into their programmes, the students were experiencing internationalisation strategies, even though as B_S4_EC said above they were unlikely to have realised the connection between the mundane and strategic dimensions of the tasks they fulfilled. Each instance of engagement (e.g. receiving *Turnitin* results for a paper, attending a lecture) provided evidence of related internationalisation strategies, which accumulated over time and subsequently allowed the students to draw an overall picture of those strategies. Take *Red* students in *4:0* joint programmes as an example (R_S1_BS, R_S2_BS, see 5.3.2), each module in their programmes and even each lecture informed them about the configurations of their *4:0* programmes and in turn the joint programme strategy. They saw that all aspects of their studies were identical to those of local students, and the only distinction from the latter appeared in the fourth (final) year when *4:0* students had to sit for exams administered by the partner university but yet marked by *Red* lecturers. Moreover, *4:0* students learned that only said exams counted towards the level of achievement written on their degrees. This wealth of evidence led them to perceive that *4:0* programmes were a glorified and more expensive version of local ones and opened in order to finance *Red*. At the same time, they found little motivation in studying because the results of all the modules they took were discounted.

Therefore, it can be said that *Blue* and *Red* students' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was embedded in their role-sensemaking and a by-product of the latter. Moreover, this sensemaking was done in a very subtle and gradual manner:

[38] Refer back to 5.1.3 for a description of *Youth Organisation* and its relation to the Vietnamese Communist Party.

> *It takes about a year to know your way around. It's hard to say how I came to understand Blue, but you just need to study and observe and listen.* (B_S2_EC)
>
> *I just do as people do, like when I first came here I heard about queueing, and I saw people queue, so I queued. After one or two years everything became an reflex and you just knew the university.* (R_S2_CS)

In this way, there was a remarkable similarity between the students and lecturers in this study, in that their sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was deeply embedded within role-sensemaking, and meaning emerged subtly and gradually.

However, three important distinctions between students and lecturers' sensemaking could be found in the data. The first was the extent of their engagement in strategic initiatives. Apart from teaching and research, many lecturers in this study had participated in at least one strategic initiative like *Blue Research Seminar* at *Blue* or *ABET* accreditation at *Red*. By contrast, only one student (R_S1_CS) was involved in an initiative (5.4.3): He had to sit for an interview with an accrediting body that *CS* applied for (the name of which he could not recall, to add). One reason was a reported lack of strategic initiatives for students (B_S3_EC; R_S3_CS), but even when there was one like the movement for academic integrity at *Blue* (4.3.1) or an accreditation round at *Red* (4.4.3), the number of participating students was low:

> *There are so many events and extra-curricular activities happening all year around. I cannot keep track of them all. I think I have seen events related to academic integrity, but I was not part of it, nor was I interested.* (B_S4_EC)
>
> *Only a few students were invited for the interview, some in the Youth Organisation like myself.* (R_S1_CS)

Second, *Blue* and *Red* students were further away from managers, particularly deans, in the sense that they had fewer opportunities to meet managers in person or to sit in meetings with them. This distance, plus the students' non-participation in strategic initiatives, meant that they had even less access to formal strategic information than the lecturers, so their understanding of internationalisation strategies heavily depended on the daily, mundane tasks and experiences of their studies. Interestingly, there were exceptions as few students in *Red* were in special positions that placed them in direct contact with managers (5.4.3), even *Red's* Vice-Chancellor (5.2.2). As a result, they had better insights into *Red's* strategies (including but not necessarily internationalisation); I will come back to this in the next section.

The last but definitely not least distinction between the sensemaking of *Blue* and *Red* students and lecturers, and deans for that matter, was social media use. Like the lecturers, the students made sense of internationalisation strategies through experiences in the physical world, but unlike the lecturers, they also made sense of the strategies through posts and discussions in the digital world. All students in this study used social media, particularly

*Facebook*, on a daily basis and stayed connected with peers and lecturers well beyond the lecture hall and academic year. Furthermore, there were *Facebook* community pages[39] for all students in each HEI (*Blue Confession* and *Red Social*), for students in a faculty, and even for a particular cohort or one single module. Most were created and managed by students, but a few were by lecturers. These *Facebook* community pages were major communication and information channels for all sorts of matters, especially those essential to fulfilling a student's role like exam schedules:

> *We get a lot of information via Facebook. We have pages for our cohort, pages for clubs on campus, pages for particular interests. You can find all sorts of stuff, like jobs, events, exam schedule.* (B_S4_EC)

> *If you want to update on current issues, check out Red Social. All the scandals are on there. The VC regularly reads and comments on posts* […] *Yes we have pages for Youth Organisation, cohorts and modules. People often post revision exercises online.* (R_S1_BS)

As a result, these pages also became venues of sensemaking of internationalisation strategies. For example, *Blue* students complained about *Turnitin* on *Blue Confession*:

> *I am very frustrated with the software Turnitin. Cannot understand why everything is marked plagiarised, why is 'thank you sincerely', 'professional work environment', 'Blue' plagiarism?* (B_SM)

While the complaints did not lead to any actions (as far as the interviews indicated), they informed students who had yet submitted their papers about the potential inaccurate detections they might receive. A more notable example was the *langcen* debacle in *Red* (5.2.3). The university's largest *Facebook* community page, *Red Social*, became the outlet for joint students to vent about the numerous problems of *langcen* and more importantly discussed how to proceed:

> *I am very angry, but I have heard that many have been turned away by the Academic Affairs Office. I want to ask all of you joints out there if we can band up and appeal to the university about langcen? I think because we came individually they can easily dismiss us, let's try doing it together.* (R_SM)

Collective sensemaking led them to file a formal complaint to the VC. This then brought about a strategic change, as *langcen's* courses were no longer compulsory for joint students. It should be re-emphasised here that *Red Social* only had such impact because the VC himself frequented this page and took action based on students' posts; with particular regards to *langcen*, he commented on two complaint posts and told the poster to contact him directly via email. Thus, for *Red* students social media was not only a sensemaking venue but a powerful sensegiving tool.

[39] Refer back to 3.5.8 for a description of *Facebook* community pages.

### 6.3.2. Special access to strategic information

One notable finding from *Red* was that a few students had special access to formal strategic information concerning not only internationalisation but other strategic areas, which was normally out of reach for all students. This was due to their special organisation positions within the university. One such position was being in programmes or modules where the lecturer held a management position. For instance, R_S2_CS and R_S4_CS had to take one with the deputy dean of *CS*, and R_S2_IE studied one module under the VC himself (5.2.2). These three students recalled occasionally hearing about institutional matters: 'I remember in a lecture the VC told us about his intentions to build a new campus nearby' (R_S2_IE). Another position was being in the *Youth Organisation*, as R_S1_CS and R_S2_CS were. Along with other *Youth Organisation* members, R_S1_CS and R_S2_CS worked closely with top management to 'execute new directions and policies' (R_S2_CS) on student activity; they often organised events for exchange students and assisted CS lecturers in holding international conferences, and R_S1_CS was once involved in accreditation work. Thanks to being in the *Youth Organisation*, R_S1_CS and R_S2_CS sometimes 'hear[d] about plans' (R_S1_CS). Yet another position was working as a recruitment assistant. As a recruitment assistant, R_S1_BS was required to learn the vision, mission statement and the 'selling points' of *Red*, some of which were in fact internationalisation strategies like EMI or accreditation. Lastly, any part-time job at *Red* that would place students in physical proximity with managers could also provide them with formal strategic information. For example, R_S3_CS, who was an IT assistant for the whole university, usually visited the offices and functional departments where he overheard about institutional matters like shortage of staff.

Nonetheless, all the students cited above said they were not interested in strategic matters or put any thoughts into them: 'We work closely with institutional leaders to organise events for students, so sometimes we hear about plans. To be honest, I don't think about them much, I just follow orders.' (R_S1_CS). This pointed back to their perception of their own role as unrelated to strategy (6.4.1) and further proved that students heavily relied on the mundane tasks and experiences of their studies to make sense of internationalisation strategies.

### 6.3.3. Facile adaptation, fight and flight, and employability

*Blue* and *Red* students' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies depended on not only their studies or social media but also their own schemas. Surprisingly, however, little variation was found between the students' schemas, and between the way one student framed an internationalisation strategy and the way he/she framed another strategy. The data strongly suggested that *Blue* and *Red* students always took a passive and adaptive frame when making sense of any tasks of their studies, and thus the internationalisation strategies those tasks reflected. That is, they framed any given task as a demand that must be met and adapted to even when it proved problematic, and therefore they refrained from complaining or providing feedback to the universities. For example, many students at *Red*

coped with the modules they could not understand in English by seeking private tutoring in Vietnamese. This passive and adaptive schema was attributed, by both *Blue* and *Red* students, to the Vietnamese school culture:

> *We have all been taught to conform in Vietnam. You know, the teacher is always right, so we adapt instead of raising our voice.* (B_S2_LC)

> *Maybe we have been conditioned since childhood that teachers are right and it is up to the students to do well.* (R_S3_CS)

Potentially, another antecedent of the students' passive, adaptive schema was their special dependence on the universities. Assuming the students wanted to make progress and achieve a degree, it was understandable that they were pressured to observe the regulations and procedures laid out by *Blue* and *Red* regarding all aspects of their programmes. In addition, it would have been extremely costly for them, in both money and time, to change university if they had found *Blue* or *Red's* teaching not to their liking, and the more they had progressed into their programmes the higher the cost became. This special dependence was mentioned by the VC of *Blue* and one *Red* student:

> *I have always told staff that in order for their children to come here, parents have to sacrifice a lot, possibly their whole life savings. We have to remember students have a lot to lose and they are listening to our lectures, so we have to provide the best education.* (B_TM)

> *My programme is not exactly what I wanted, but I cannot just change everything after three years of study. That would waste too much money, time, effort. Perhaps once I get my degree, I will apply for short courses in* [his field of choice]. (R_S1_CS)

Three forms of adaptation were found in the data. For one, adaptation simply meant conforming to any requirements by *Blue* and *Red*. For example, *Blue* students in *LC* chose their second foreign language from the four *Blue* specified (4.5), or *Red* students had to get used to learning in English, which was novel for them. That said, the fact that many *Blue* students chose Chinese indicated there was more complexity to conformity; I will come back to this very shortly in the next paragraph. Second, the students could adapt by developing coping mechanisms. Coping was how *Red* students responded to EMI, as they paid for private tutoring in Vietnamese for the modules they had trouble with in English. The third form of adaptation was the most interesting, in that the students attempted to conform but in a way that compromised rules and regulations. This was best demonstrated by *Blue* students when avoiding detection by *Turnitin*; instead of proper paraphrasing, they put whole chunks of original text in quotation marks, or knowingly plagiarised and then changed a few words to keep detection down. Briefly put, the students simultaneously *adapted to* the *Turnitin* initiative and *adapted* it.

Regardless of the form of adaptation *Blue* and *Red* students engaged in, it appeared that they would choose the easiest course of action. This explained why *Blue* students picked Chinese over French for their foreign language requirement, or why *Red* students paid for private Vietnamese tutoring instead of, for example, trying to self-study in English or improve their English competence to begin with. Therefore, it can be said that the students did not only frame internationalisation strategies as demands that must be adapted to, but adaptation had to be done in a *facile* way. This made the students' schemas resemble those of lecturers in that they were highly self-interested.

Nevertheless, there were situations where adaptation was not possible, and the students had to fight or flight. One instance was the English courses at *langcen* that *Red* joint students were required to take (5.2.3). In this scenario, adaptation was perceived as unacceptable due to the myriad of problems that *langcen's* courses poses. As a result, they decided to *fight* this aspect of *Red's* EMI strategy. Initially, they complained to the *Academic Affairs Office*, which was responsible for handling issues like *langcen*, but failed to achieve any results; on the contrary, they were scolded by officers. They then took to *Red Social* to share bad experiences with both *langcen* and *Academic Affairs* Office, as well as to discuss elevating the issue to the VC. Because they knew the VC frequented *Red Social*, it could be said that their intention was to inform him and request his actions on *langcen*. Another instance of adaptation being impossible was the language requirement at *Blue* (4.5.2). There were few students who chose not to get a certificate in English and/or a second foreign language, thereby forfeiting their degrees, because they had already got a desirable job and no longer found necessity in completing their programmes. In other words, they took *flight* from *Blue's* language strategy. It should be acknowledged, however, that these students did attempt to obtain a language certificate before giving up. The decisions to fight or flight of *Blue* and *Red* students accentuated the self-interested nature their schemas.

Apart from adaptation, *Blue* and *Red* students' schemas were centred on another concern: employability. It can be seen throughout Chapter 4 and 6 that the students often framed a given internationalisation strategy according to its employment value. For example, *Blue* students in *LC* were not motivated to learn a second foreign language because they perceived that anything beyond English was not in high demand enough to warrant extra effort, more so considering they were already challenged by English (4.5.1). In a similar way, *Red* students chose joint programmes, even the problematic *4:0* ones (5.3.2), because they saw that employers in Vietnam preferred a Western degree to a local one. The most striking example about employability as a sensemaking frame was the reported drop-outs at *Blue*, who had found desired employment prior to graduation and consequently had little motivation to attain a foreign language certificate to complete their programmes (5.5.2). Employability was a quite curious type of schemas because it showed *Blue* and *Red* students were making sense of internationalisation strategies from the perspective of employers. In this way, there were institutional influences on the students' framing.

### 6.3.4. Starting early

An interesting finding with both *Blue* and *Red* students was that they made sense of internationalisation strategies even before entering the universities. Months before application, the students in this study had sought information about *Blue* and *Red*, and other prospective universities for that matter. They did so via various means, including open days, exhibitions, seminars, acquaintances and social media. Indeed, a cursory browse of *Blue Confession* and *Red Social* yielded many posts by prospective students asking for information. The range of enquiry topics was extensive, pertaining to what they valued in a university education like teaching, extra-curricular, culture, and of course internationalisation was also among the topics:

> *I want to apply to Blue next year as it is one of the best universities for tourism and hospitality. I heard that final year students can go on internships abroad. Can we stay and work afterwards?* (B_SM)

> *As you know there are two joint programmes in my faculty, each with a different partner institution. I looked up their ranking online and the choice was clear,* [British institution name] *was much better. I don't know why people would choose the other.* (R_S2_CS on how she chose her joint programme)

This preliminary sensemaking provided the students with expectations of internationalisation strategies, which then had an impact on post-enrolment sensemaking. This was best evident by *Red* students. For example, when R_S2_BS saw *Red's* advertisement that it was the first 'Vietnamese public university to wholly use English', she expected English to be used for all communication, within and outside the lecture, and this expectation was in fact shared by a few others like R_S3_BS and R_S1_IE (5.2.1). Post-enrolment, however, she discovered this was not true and English was used for teaching only. Nonetheless, she decided to speak English to some of her friends, among whom was R_S4_BS, because she wanted to practice the language. Despite unfavourable reaction from peers, she kept speaking English on campus and only stopped when she encountered a critical incident:

> *Friends looked at us as if we had been crazy, but I didn't care. One day we were outside a lift, and there was this lecturer who happened to go by; he heard us speaking in English and teased us, something like 'What are you speaking English for?'. I felt embarrassed and upset and stopped speaking English outside lectures.* (R_S2_BS)

In another instance, when applying for one of *Red's 4:0* programmes, R_S1_BS and R_S2_BS had expected their programmes to be different from local ones (5.3.2). However, their experiences post-enrolment were to the contrary because they had to share the same modules, lectures and assessment with local students. The only difference was that they had to sit for exams administered by the partner university in

their last year. Furthermore, the results of these exams were the sole basis to determine the level of achievement they would graduate with, thus rendering the results of all their modules obsolete apart from proving eligibility for said exams. This violation of expectations was not received well by the *4:0* students, who found 'no motivation in doing [their] best' and remarked that it was 'unfair for those who did' (R_S2_BS).

*Blue* and *Red* students' pre-entry sensemaking problematised the role-embeddedness of their internationalisation-strategy for two compounding reasons. First, pre-entry sensemaking happened when the students were yet to have a role in their future universities, so it cannot be said that pre-entry sensemaking was embedded in role sensemaking. On the contrary, pre-entry sensemaking actually shaped the students' role later on. As shown above, it created expectations that led to certain behaviours and attitudes once the students had become enrolled – in other words, when they had a role in *Blue* and *Red*.

While no explicit explanation was found in the data, it seemed the reason *Blue* and *Red* students engaged in substantial pre-entry sensemaking was the great stakes they had in their then future universities. Were they to make a mistake in choosing a suitable university, it would then be extremely costly in terms of money and time to change institution, and the cost would only increase the more progress they made into their programmes:

> *I have always told staff that in order for their children to come here, parents have to sacrifice a lot, possibly their whole life savings. We have to remember students have a lot to lose and they are listening to our lectures, so we have to provide the best education.* (B_TM)

> *My programme is not exactly what I wanted, but I cannot just change everything after three years of study. That would waste too much money, time, effort. Perhaps once I get my degree, I will apply for short courses in* [his field of choice]. (R_S1_CS)

All this is not to say the lecturers and deans in this study had not done their homework prior to entering their universities. However, their pre-entry sensemaking was much more limited. With the exception of B_MM_EC, none of the lecturers or deans sought and/or had as much exposure to their universities as the students did, and what they knew was confined to job advertisements (e.g. B_L3_EC) and recommendations from acquaintances (e.g. R_L3_CS). Once again the data offered no clear explanation, but it seemed the lecturers and deans did not have as much stakes in their universities. For example, R_MM1_BS said that many lecturers in his faculty moonlighted (holding a part-time job) in the evening by teaching short courses in other universities, with which they gained extra income.

### 6.3.5. Summary of students' sensemaking

In summary, *Blue* and *Red* students' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies was clearly embedded within their role sensemaking. The students were not at all interested in strategic matters, and this included the few who happened to have access to formal strategic information. Instead, *Blue* and *Red* students focused on the tasks and experiences of their own studies, through which they were able to make sense of any internationalisation strategies those tasks and experiences reflected. Meaning then emerged gradually and subtly, even more so than was the case for the lecturers because the students had fewer opportunities to talk to managers or be involved in strategic initiatives; therefore, the students' sensemaking almost completely depended on the daily, mundane tasks and experiences of their studies. Seldom, the students might be in special positions, such as the *Youth Organisation*, that afforded them access to strategic information; however, even then they had little interest in internationalisation as a strategic matter.

The physical world was not the only place for sensemaking. One special finding with *Blue* and *Red* students was the prevalent use of social media as a venue for making sense of all aspects of their studies, including internationalisation. In *Red*, social media was also a tool for strategic change, thanks to the VC paying attention to it and more generally his focus on student satisfaction.

All the students in this study approached internationalisation strategies with the same facile adaptation schema, which suggested that they were highly self-interested. Depending on the strategy and the students' capability, adaptation could come in three forms, namely conformity, coping or compromise. Where adaptation was not possible, *Blue* and *Red* students could decide to fight and demand change to the strategy, or take flight from doing what the strategy required, even if this meant forfeiting their degrees. Another major element of the students' schemas was employability, which was shaped by the institutional forces of the labour market.

Last but not least, *Blue* and *Red* students started making sense of internationalisation strategies even before enrolling in the universities, because as highschool students they had to make a decision on where to study for their undergraduate. This pre-entry sensemaking generated expectations of the strategies, which had an impact on the students' attitude and behaviour towards the strategies post-enrolment. Pre-entry sensemaking problematised the role-embeddedness of students' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking, because at this early stage the students had yet had a role in *Blue* or *Red*, and on the contrary, any meaning made this early actually shaped their role later on by creating expectations of what they should do.

It can be seen that *Blue* and *Red* students' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was characterised by features that set it apart from deans' and lecturers', namely social media use and pre-entry sensemaking. Accordingly, its impact on internationalisation strategies were special in some respects. First, the use of social media enhanced the students' enactment of internationalisation strategies by providing a venue for them to collectively make sense of their studies, which might involve internationalisation elements. In rare circumstances, collective sensemaking on social media might even effect change, as was the case with *langcen* at *Red*. Second, the impact of *Blue* and *Red* students' sensemaking on the universities' internationalisation strategies was present prior to enrolment. This was because the students' pre-entry sensemaking generated expectations of the strategies, which then primed their behaviour towards them.

Nevertheless, the most defining feature of *Blue* and *Red* students' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was its marked role-embeddedness. Therefore, most of the time its impact was subtle and could be found in the very mundane, routine tasks of the students' studies. For example, *Blue* students helped realised the university' multi-lingualism by making sense of which foreign language to undertake in addition to English. These outcomes, moreover, were mostly made in a way that fit the students' facile adaptation schema, and over time such sensemaking might result in a common practice that shaped a strategy in unintended ways. For example, many *Blue* students chose Chinese as the second foreign language as it was the easiest to be certified in, which could render *Blue*'s intended multi-lingualism ineffective by reducing linguistic diversity.

## 6.4. Chapter conclusion: Raw materials prepared

Drawing on the data presented in Chapter 4 and 5, this chapter has compared the two case studies of *Blue* and *Red* to uncover the themes and patters in the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of each group of university non-leaders (deans, lecturers and students). Additional data has also been pulled in to flesh out existing data, with a view to providing more details about the groups (e.g. students' use of social media). All this has helped reveal key sensemaking themes of each group and highlight the role-embeddedness of their sensemaking of internationalisation strategies, with few caveats (e.g. students' pre-entry sensemaking). More importantly, this chapter has prepared the empirical basis for discussion in Chapter 7.

This concluding section will not summarise the sensemaking themes of deans, lecturers and students because it would take up too much space (please refer back to 6.1.5, 6.2.3 and 6.3.5). What this section will do instead is to highlight four key differences between the three university non-leader groups so that they can be explored in Chapter 7.

First, the role-embeddedness of internationalisation-strategy sensemaking can be problematised in certain circumstances. For most of the deans, lecturers and students in this study, they did not focus on internationalisation strategies as the subject of sensemaking, and their attention was instead directed at the tasks and experiences that were immediate to their respective roles (e.g. administration for *Red* deans, teaching and student feedback for *Blue* lecturers). Yet, it was through these that the participants developed an understanding of any related internationalisation strategies. The caveats emerged, however, from the accounts of *Blue* deans' sensemaking and the students' pre-entry sensemaking. These instances of sensemaking were not embedded in role sensemaking (6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.3.5). On the contrary, they helped shaped the one's role.

Second, be it role-embedded or non-role embedded sensemaking, deans, lecturers and students demonstrated significant differences in access to information, at both group and individual level. One example of group-level difference was between lecturers and students: Both had their internationalisation-strategy sensemaking deeply role-embedded, but the former occasionally gained access to strategic information via faculty meetings where announcements of institutional decisions were made, while the latter did not (6.3.1). An example of individial difference was how a few *Red* students possessed strategic information normally beyond students' reach, thanks to their special organisational positions such as part-time work with administrative offices (6.3.2).

Third, there were also clear distinctions between the schemas of each non-leader group. The deans framed internationalisation strategies in their beliefs about universities and/or management style. The lecturers, in comparison, made sense of internationalisation strategies against the background of their own personal interests, understanding of their universities and disciplinary features. Lastly, the students framed internationalisation strategies as demands that they had to adapt to, albeit in the most facile way possible; they also framed the strategies in terms of how much their employability could be enhanced. In addition, there were strong indications of institutional infuences at the meso (organisational) and macro (field, societal) in non-leaders' schemas.

Fourth, unique features were found in the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of each non-leader group. *Blue* and *Red* deans engaged heavily at the frontline to execute their own ideas and gather feedback; the frontline might even inspire new ideas. The lecturers' sensemaking were unique for its political dimension, in that their relations with colleagues affected their view of internationalisation strategies. The students stood out for substantially making sense of internationalisation strategies before enrolment and use of social media as both a sensemaking and sensegiving tool.

Finally, despite differences in sensemaking patterns, the non-leaders at Blue and Red showed that their sensemaking played a clear role in shaping the outcomes of internationalisation strategies and, in some cases, the strategies themselves. Differences in the non-leaders' sensemaking, however, were meaningful with regards to what kind of impact each group had on internationalisation strategies.

# CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This chapter discusses the key issues of university non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies which emerged from the comparative analyses in Chapter 6. In keeping with my focus on the *praxis* aspect of Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) research (refer back to 2.2.2.2 and 2.2.2.3), the issues to be discussed revolve around the process and activity of sensemaking itself, more than the sensemaker or the tools and norms they employ – in SAP terms, *practitioners* and *practices*. This does not mean, however, that there is no discussion of practitioners or practices, because the sensemaking process cannot be understood without, at the very least, being contextualised with who is doing the sensemaking and what practices are used. Indeed, this study has shown that the characteristics of a practitioner, particularly organisational role, does affect sensemaking. Likewise, sensemaking practices cannot be discounted, like deans' communication style and students' use of social media. Thus, this chapter will also discuss sensemaking practitioners and practices precisely in order to comprehensively illuminate sensemaking praxis and also to do the data full justice.

The issues will be discussed inductively. First, they will be framed and described using both cross-case themes and the theoretical building blocks afforded by sensemaking theory, including *trigger*, *schema*, *cues* and *enactment*, as detailed in Chapter 2 (see 2.2.3.1 to 2.2.3.7). Afterwards, relevant sensemaking literature will be drawn upon, especially the two substantial reviews by Maitlis and Christianson (2014) and Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015), in order to demonstrate the positioning of my findings in relation to previous research. References will also be made to the broader management and organisation studies literature where appropriate.

Based on the issues discussed, I will draw the answer to the research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* and also look at the relevance of university non-leaders' sensemaking to the strategic management of internationalisation.

This chapter will then present how the framing of my research question and the findings have contributed to scholarship on higher education internationalisation, SAP and sensemaking. More specifically, an argument will first be made for the value of studying higher education internationalisation from the perspective of strategic management, specifically SAP, with sensemaking theory as the theoretical lens. Afterwards, I will talk about how this study has furthered the SAP movement in strategic management thanks to a combination of sensemaking theory and under-researched organisational members, especially frontliners (lecturers, students in this case). Lastly, an outline of the many contributions to sensemaking theory will be provided.

There are two sections in this chapter. The first (7.1) builds up the answer to my research question by discussing the sensemaking of internationalisation strategies by university non-leaders (deans, lecturers, students). The second (7.2) looks at the contributions to theory of this study.

## 7.1. University non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies

This discussion chapter now starts with how university internationalisation strategies are made sense of by non-leaders, which is central to answering the research question. More specifically, three areas of sensemaking issues will be explored with in this section. The first consists of issues that run across all three university non-leader groups studied (deans, lecturers and students), but manifest differently in each. These intergroup issues include role-embedded sensemaking (7.1.1), cues sources and access (7.1.2), and schemas (7.1.3). While the issues are distinct in their own rights, they are all related to, if not stem from the features of each group's organisational role. For instance, deans have much more access to sources of strategic information than students, because as part of their role they often have to receive and relay such information from top management to staff. Therefore, a discussion of intergroup issues must also examine the role features of deans, lecturers and students. As shall be seen later, such examination reveals two role archetypes, one of which can be further divided into two sub-types.

The second area for discussion consists of issues that are specific to one university non-leader group (7.1.4). They are communication and frontline engagement for deans (7.1.4.1), the political dimension of sensemaking for lecturers (7.1.4.2), and lastly for students, social media (7.1.4.3). One finding specific to students – the early start of their sensemaking, will be included in 7.1.1 because it is highly relevant to that section. Along with the intergroup issues above, these group-specific ones bring out the uniqueness in how each group makes sense of an internationalisation strategy and in turn explain why and how one group's sensemaking is different from that of the next.

The third area is the empowering role of university leaders, specifically top management, in non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies (7.1.5). Despite the focus of this study on the latter, the data shows that university leaders cannot be discounted, because they may involve non-leaders in strategic decision-making and thus provide them with great agency to make sense of internationalisation strategies and enact their meaning.

With all key issues discussed, I will present the emerging answer to my research question in 7.1.6 and then examine the relevance of university non-leaders' sensemaking to the strategic management of internationalisation in 7.1.7. A table will also be provided in 7.1.6 to

summarise the theoretical findings from 7.1.1 to 7.1.5 and illustrate the similarities and differences in the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of university non-leaders.

### 7.1.1. Intergroup issue 1: Role-embedded sensemaking

The central finding of this study, on both empirical and theoretical levels, is that in almost all cases non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies is embedded in sensemaking of the tasks and experiences of their role. To re-iterate previous three empirical chapters, the majority of deans, lecturers and students are hardly if ever concerned about how their university internationalises. Instead, their focus is directed at the immediate and mundane tasks they have to fulfil as part of their roles, plus any experiences that their roles bring. As a result, all sensemaking efforts are channelled into role-related matters. For example, a rank and file lecturer at *Red* would not be interested in how the EMI strategy was implemented, such as the English courses that aimed to help students learn academic modules in English. What this lecturer would be much more concerned about was making him/herself understood during lectures or marking assignments and giving feedback in English. Yet, exactly by making sense of the immediate and mundane reality of their roles, non-leaders come to understand the internationalisation strategies of the university. This is because some of the very tasks and experiences of their roles do contain internationalisation elements and therefore reflect, in part or full, relevant internationalisation strategies. Continuing the last example, every lecture at *Red* reflected its EMI strategy, so the lecturers could make sense of how well EMI was implemented (e.g. how articulate their students were) and whether there were problems with the strategy.

In this way, the central and most notable finding about non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies is its embeddedness in role sensemaking. That said, it is necessary to further unpack this role-embeddedness delineate its two constituent characteristics: implicitness and mundanity. As shall be seen shortly, these characteristics pose ontological challenges to current sensemaking research, which has always conceptualised sensemaking as an explicit process that only takes place during episodes of great uncertainty (Weick, 1995; Balogun & Johnson, 2005).

On top of this, it is worth examining situations where internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is not embedded in role sensemaking, which can also be of theoretical value. This will be discussed much further down.

#### 7.1.1.1. The implicit and mundane nature of role-embedded sensemaking

Being embedded in role sensemaking means that internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is, first and foremost, implicit. As stated above, non-leaders' lack of interest in internationalisation strategies does not mean a lack of sensemaking, but that

internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is embedded in role sensemaking. This study has found that, during role sensemaking, university non-leaders pay attention to cues that are essential to a task or experience at hand, but at the same time cues about the internationalisation strategy reflected in said task or experience are still taken in, interpreted and even at times remembered in exact details. This was evident by the participants' vivid accounts about *Blue* and *Red's* internationalisation strategies, reported in Chapter 4 and 5, even though they explicitly stated their lack of interest in them. It can be strongly argued, therefore, that the gathering and interpretation of cues about internationalisation strategies do not happen with intent or even consciously, but rather in an implicit manner. For example, *Blue* lecturers only paid attention to *Turnitin* usage as it was required during marking; however, they could still implicitly make sense of why the *Turnitin* initiative failed by noticing students' low awareness of plagiarism and academic writing capability, or their own compromise due to dependence on student feedback and workplace politics. Even when no role sensemaking is necessary, internationalisation-strategy still implicitly occurs. One excellent example was how no sensemaking of joint programmes was necessary for *Red* lecturers, and yet the they could implicitly observe that joint programmes did very little to help *Red* improve its teaching due to lack of communication from the partner institutions about the quality of students transferring over and lack of joint teaching activity. With all that said, perhaps the best evidence for the implicitness of role-embedded internationalisation-strategy sensemaking was the participants' own description of it:

> *Just by working here I got a sense of how things were* […] *Through dean duties I have formed a better view of the environment here.* (R_MM_CS)
>
> *It's hard to say when you understand the university. You just understand it after some time.* (B_L2_EC)
>
> *It takes about a year to know your way around. It's hard to say how I came to understand Blue, but you just need to study and observe and listen.* (B_S2_EC)
>
> *I have always had inklings about the stuff you asked, but never said it out like now. (R_L3_CS)*

The present finding about implicit sensemaking stands in great contrast to prior sensemaking research. Since Weick's (1995) seminal work, sensemaking has been very often if not always conceptualised as explicit; that is, the sensemaker is conscious of what he/she is making sense of and the sensemaking process occurs with intent. This is likely because the subject of sensemaking is tangible, concrete and can be perceived with ease, and the trigger is strong and draws immediate attention. For example, Christianson et al. (2009) studied the collapse of a museum's roof, or Dunbar and Garud (2009) looked at the shedding of foam during space shuttles' flight. Even less critical sensemaking subjects in previous research are still clearly tangible, such as shifts in the industry (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) or the restructuring of a firm (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). By contrast, the sensemaking subject in this study – internationalisation strategies are more intangible and abstract, because they are not an incident, person or object, but rather long-term plans and patterns (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, &

Lampel, 2008) that are embedded in the tasks and experiences of one's role. Internationalisation strategies are especially intangible for university non-leaders, who lack access to strategic information and have little motivation to gain it. Furthermore, the trigger for sensemaking is often subtle and might not command any attention, as it can be as simple as an internationalisation-related incident during the daily flow of tasks and experiences of a non-leader's role. For example, *Blue* students' sensemaking of *Turnitin* and plagiarism was triggered when they were first told they had to submit papers to *Turnitin*. I wish to note here that because internationalisation strategies are embedded in many tasks and experiences over time (e.g. *Red's* EMI strategy was reflected in every lecture), there can be no single, one-off trigger for the sensemaking of one strategy. Take *Red's* EMI strategy as an example, every new lecturer, or more precisely listening to every new lecturer could be a trigger for students to make sense of how well EMI was done. I will come back to this issue of multiple triggers when discussing the second characteristic of embedded sensemaking – its mundane roots.

With that said, the implicitness being discussed is important because it means that, as long as the sensemaking subject in embedded in the sensemaker's role, he/she does not necessarily have to be conscious of the subject in order to make sense of it. Yet, it is this implicitness and the resulting tacit understanding of the organisation that guides behaviours, which in turn produce tangible, concrete outcome (intended or not) for any given strategies. For example, *Red* students' implicit sensemaking of EMI informed them that they could switch to Vietnamese and expect a Vietnamese response from lecturers. Language switch was in fact a common practice at *Red*, and this was not the intended outcome of its EMI strategy.

The second consequence of being role-embedded is that internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is strongly tied to the mundane, routine organisational reality surrounding non-leaders. From the moment they enter the university to their departure, non-leaders are progressively faced with new and ambiguous tasks which they have to make sense of and which, for the purpose of this study, contain internationalisation elements. More importantly, although some of the tasks appear during episodes of great uncertainty, like when the dean of *Red's Computer Science* (R_MM_CS) had to get the faculty accredited by *ABET*, most of them emerge from the mundane, routine organisational reality of the university. For example, apart from the *ABET* initiative, R_MM_CS became familiar with *Red's* internationalisation strategies through daily administrative work. At *Blue*, students in *Language and Culture* had to naturally make sense of the language strategy and *Turnitin* during their studies, specifically towards fourth/final year when they were required to submit two foreign language certificates and have their papers scanned by *Turnitin*. Nevertheless, the best example for the mundanity in internationalisation-strategy sensemaking came from *Red* lecturers. Every new academic year they had to teach a new cohort and probably take on new modules or update existing ones. This presented them with new challenges and thus ambiguities to make sense of, but also enabled them to (implicitly) track the evolution of the EMI strategy because they could, say, assess if later cohorts were more comfortable learning

in English. R_S3_BS, in particular, noticed that over his seven years at *Red* the English competence of students 'got better and better'.

Findings about the mundane are yet another point of contrast with extant sensemaking research, in which the mundane is almost always side-lined in favour of episodes of great uncertainty as the settings for sensemaking. These episodes can be, as listed earlier, the collapse of a museum's roof and ensuing reaction (Christianson et al., 2009) or the restructuring of a firm (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). In their extensive review, Maitlis and Christianson (2014) identify three types of such episodes, namely environmental jolts and organisational crises, threats to individual and organisational identity, and planned change intervention. All three episodes present the sensemaker with sharp disruptions to the status quo and demand their urgent response. In such situation, the moment of triggering is dramatic, and subsequent sensemaking is intensive until an episode is resolved. This study, by contrast, does not look at sensemaking of any particular episodes but rather of a strategic area of a university – internationalisation and from the particular perspective of non-leaders. It has found that in order to accomplish this sensemaking, non-leaders do rely on disruptive episodes (e.g. the *ABET* initiative at *Red*) but much more so on the mundane and routine tasks and experiences of their roles like operating the faculty, delivering a lecture or attending one. This is perhaps unsurprising because internationalisation strategies, both in the form of plans and activity patterns (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2008), permeate and are reflected in the many tasks and experiences that non-leaders face on a day to day basis, which can be safely assumed to be greater in numbers than disruptive episodes in most organisations (it would be hard to imagine a university operating by disruptive episodes, compared to, e.g. a squad of soldiers in a warzone). It follows that the mundane does not trigger sensemaking in dramatic ways or lead to intensive, temporally delineated sensemaking. Instead, the trigger is subtle, as discussed earlier, and sensemaking happens perpetually as long as the sensemaker faces ambiguity with regards to a certain internationalisation strategy when fulfilling his/her non-leader role. For example, *Blue* lecturers in *Economics and Commerce*, especially those who wanted to do research, perpetually made sense of the state of research through tasks and experiences that research was embedded in, like performance evaluation, pay rise and promotion, research activities (e.g. *Blue Research Seminar*). Moreover, there can be no single trigger for sensemaking of an internationalisation strategy but multiple triggers, each attached to one task or experience that reflects said strategy. Continuing the last example, *EC* lecturers' sensemaking of research was triggered by faculty meetings where B_MM_EC reminded them of the importance or research, annual performance evaluations or by *Blue Research Seminars*. Another example was that studying under every new lecturer could trigger *Red* students' sensemaking of how well EMI was done and whether language switch was necessary with said lecturer.

All this begs the question why university non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies is of value when most of it is about the mundane and consequently the status quo, rather than disruptions. While disruptive episodes (e.g. the *langcen* debacle and *ABET*

initiative at *Red*) are undoubtedly useful for non-leaders to understand and function in the university, I would contend, as in Chapter 2, that the mundane should not be discounted as a setting and subject for sensemaking. First, ambiguities exist not only in disruptive episodes but also the mundane and routine. For example, it was ambiguous for *Blue* lecturers in *EC* whether research was worth pursuing and how to do it, and this ambiguity existed in and had to be made sense of through routine activities like *Blue Research Seminars*, registering for modules (of which the lecture schedule clashed with *Blue Research Seminars*), annual performance evaluation (that heavily favoured teaching), calculating pay (that would have been lost due to time spent on research instead of teaching). Second, while these ambiguities will not instantly make or break an organisation like those in a crisis, they must nonetheless be successfully made sense of in order for the university as an organisation, as well as individual non-leaders, to function. For example, if joint programme students at *Red* had not made sense of the requirements and procedure for transfer at any time during the home stage, all of the joint programmes would have been paralysed, because the students themselves would have missed the transfer. Third, sensemaking of the mundane and routine might provide a basis for sensemaking of disruptive episodes. Once instance of this was when *Red* joint students elevated the *langcen* issue to the VC to demand change, thus creating a disruptive episode. To achieve their goal, they referred to any understanding they had previously gathered from routinely attending *langcen* courses and dealing with *langcen* staff and the *Academic Affairs Office*. Another instance was when *Red* lecturers in *CS* used their knowledge of the faculty, gained from their day to day job, to write reports for *ABET*. For the above three reasons, it is rather unfortunate that the mundane has been a gap in existing sensemaking research, especially considering sensemaking of the mundane can inform that of disruptive episodes. Interestingly, the need to investigate the mundane was identified very early on by Gioia and Mehra (1996) in their review of Weick's (1995) book and recently by Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015), but it seems very little has been done to address it.

#### 7.1.1.2. Non-role embedded sensemaking

Nevertheless, this study has found two particular situations where non-leaders' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is not embedded in role sensemaking. One is when newly-recruited deans define their own roles, which involves analysing the university's strategies, including internationalisation. The key notion here is 'role definition' because these deans are not just any deans but those who are recruited with no specific role except to take their faculties forward strategically, in alignment with the university's corporate strategy. Briefly put, they can be called strategy drivers. Both *Blue* deans in this study were strategy drivers; in fact, as said by *Blue* VC herself, all deans at *Blue* were recruited or appointed to 'develop faculties, not operate them [since] operation [was] the responsibility of deputy deans'. Therefore, the first thing that strategy-driver deans do and are enabled to is to make sense of the university's component strategies and the conditions of their faculties in order to choose an appropriate strategy to drive and devise ways to accomplish this. The outcome of this sensemaking is none other than the role strategy-driver deans set

for themselves, mostly in the form of strategic initiatives to push the strategy they have chosen. For example, the dean of *Blue's EC* (B_MM_EC) dedicated his first term to pushing research in the faculty, upon seeing that research was a component strategy and yet little research activity was found (to add, his personal belief in research should not be discounted). It can thus be argued that for these deans, internationalisation-strategy sensemaking *is* role sensemaking rather than being embedded in the latter.

The other situation of non-role embedded sensemaking is when prospective students make sense of internationalisation strategies in order to make an application for entrance onto a programme. One special finding about students is that they start making sense of the HEI's internationalisation strategies (as well as other strategies) when they have to decide where to apply for university. This is significant as it means that students' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking begins before they have a role in the university, so there is no role-associated tasks or experiences through which internationalisation strategies are understood. Indeed, this study has found that at this stage students ask explicit and direct questions about internationalisation strategies. For *Blue* and *Red* students, these questions included internship opportunities abroad, the difficulty of learning in English, joint programme tuition fee, the ranking of partner institutions. Perhaps more importantly, students' pre-entry sensemaking of any strategies creates expectations that shape their post-entry behaviour and sensemaking of the same strategies. This was best exemplified by R_S2_BS, who misinterpreted *Red's* advertisement of EMI as English being used not only for teaching but all communication (interestingly, to add, she was not the only student to think so). Although she discovered the mistake once enrolled, she still spoke English to her friends outside lectures as she believed *Red* was the appropriate place to do so. In this way, it can be argued that students' pre-entry sensemaking is role defining in nature due to the behaviour and attitude-priming effects of the expectations it creates. Even without the expectations, the argument that pre-entry sensemaking is role defining might still stand for the simple reason that pre-entry sensemaking determines which programmes of the university students apply for and therefore their future place in the organisation.

The above findings problematise and enrich the present discussion on role-embeddedness by demonstrating that not all non-leaders make sense of internationalisation strategies in a role-embedded manner, but their mode of sensemaking (role-embedded or non-role embedded) depends on the specific roles they have. This link will be explored in the next section.

The findings about non-role embedded sensemaking also point to another theoretical issue in sensemaking research: sensemaking about the future. A common characteristic of strategic-driver deans and prospective students' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies is its future orientation, which has been a point of debate in the sensemaking literature. The classic work of Weick (1995) conceptualises sensemaking as retrospective; that

is, sensemaking is only feasible if the subject of sensemaking has happened, or in the author's own words: 'How can I know what I think until I see what I say?' (p.18). This emphasis on retrospection means that sensemaking about the future is done in future perfect tense, where the sensemaker imagines a future state and then makes sense of that hypothetical future as if he/she arrived at it (Gioia, Corley, & Fabbri, 2002; Gioia, 2006). More recent research, however, critiques this idea and argues that sensemaking of the future is prospective rather than retrospective (MacKay 2009; Gephart, Topal, & Zhang, 2010; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015); many of these authors question whether retrospective future sensemaking is possible under circumstances of great complexity and ambiguity or when the sensemaker's own 'expectations [and] aspirations about the future in unclear' (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012, p. 35). I would argue further that if future sensemaking is indeed retrospective, how can the sensemaker create the hypothetical desired future state to begin with (in enough detail, to add), if not through some form of prospective sensemaking? That said, proponents of prospective future sensemaking acknowledge that it has to be based on prior, retrospective sensemaking about the past and present (Gephart, Topal, & Zhang, 2010; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012).

My study appears to support the prospective view, although the data is not conclusive. When defining what they would do to drive *Blue's* internationalisation strategies, *Blue* deans were not envisioning a clear future state, from which meaning could be generated retrospectively. While there was no explicit evidence for this, the deans' recollection of how they came up with initiatives strongly suggested so, for example: 'There is too much plagiarism in Vietnam, but we do not have a tool to stop it. I was looking for a software to scan plagiarised texts.' (B_MM_EC remembering his purchase of *Turnitin*). It can be seen that they started with a preliminary idea and desire and then acted upon it, without a clear future state in mind, and that this prospective sensemaking was based on assessment of the past and present (e.g. plagiarism in Vietnam and the lack of an anti-plagiarism tool at *Blue*). Similar prospection was found with *Blue* and *Red* students' pre-entry sensemaking of the universities' internationalisation strategies. The understanding they gained from, for example, open days and social media (i.e. retrospective sensemaking of past and present) helped them make the application decision and also created expectations of the tasks and experiences they would face post-entry. For example, several *Red* students expected English to be used both in and outside the lecture. It is difficult to describe these expectations as a future state that the students could look backwards from. Moreover, the students' accounts of why and how they applied for *Blue* and *Red* made no mention of any future state they imagined themselves to be in post-entry, nor were they detailed enough to suggest its existence.

### 7.1.1.3. Role archetypes and mode of sensemaking

So far this chapter has discussed the two modes of non-leaders' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking, namely role-embedded and non-role embedded. However, it is not enough to examine the modes by themselves but against the formal role that each non-leader group is assigned with. Chapter 6 has shown that which mode a non-leader group engage in is dependent on the features of its assigned role; moreover, if one is to talk about role-

embedded sensemaking of internationalisation strategies, there should be mention of the role through which university non-leaders experience internationalisation strategies. A discussion of the link between non-leaders' roles and the two modes is therefore necessary in order to explore which mode is associated with which group and why.

An examination of aggregated role features of all the deans, lecturers and students in this study reveals that they fall into two role archetypes: strategy driver and strategy recipient, which also correspond to their modes of internationalisation-strategy sensemaking. Strategy drivers, exemplified by *Blue* deans, are characterised by

- agency and authority to act upon the university's strategies via strategic initiatives (e.g. *Blue Research Seminar*) that might even alter existing structures (e.g. *research-lecturer* contractual scheme, *Turnitin*)
- lack of task specificity. On the contrary, they have to devise their own tasks so as to drive strategies.

In this study, only deans are found to be strategy drivers. These deans engage in the non-role embedded mode when they make sense of internationalisation strategies, because they need to have an explicit understanding of them in order to define their role.

By contrast, all other participants can be categorised as strategy recipients. These non-leaders are the opposite of strategy in the sense that they have

- little if any agency or authority to act upon the university's strategies. It is very difficult for them to create strategic initiatives even if they want to (R_MM1_BS).
- high task specificity. They are on the receiving end of tasks already well-defined by another party, such as top management or a programme coordinator (in the case of deans and students, respectively). These tasks can be implementation of a strategic initiative (deans) or simply daily administration (deans), marking (lecturers), attending lectures (students), all of which reflect certain strategies of the university.

Strategy recipients therefore have little interest in strategic matters. Instead, their concern and thus sensemaking efforts are directed at the tasks they are specified to do. This means that role-embedded sensemaking is the default mode for strategy recipients' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies.

Strategy recipients can be further divided into two sub-types: strategy implementers, exemplified by *Red* deans, and strategy followers, exemplified by all *Blue* and *Red* lecturers and students. The difference between them is decision-making power. Strategy implementers, who in this study are only deans, directly receive strategy from top management in the form of strategic initiatives to execute (e.g. the *ABET* initiative at *Red*) or 'areas of activity' (R_MM_CS) to manage or oversee. Although unable to decide what the initiatives and areas of activity are, they have control over what should be done about them,

including downward communication to strategy followers and setting specific tasks for the latter. Strategy followers, as the name suggests, follow orders and carry out said tasks to fulfil their role and at the same time realise strategies. They have the least decision power of all non-leader groups in this study, since all of their tasks are specified beforehand with little space for individual design. However, this study has found that strategy followers can induce strategic change (e.g. *Red* students and the *langcen* debacle) and thus alter the tasks, but this requires strong support from top management (see also 7.1.5). With all that said, both strategy implementers and followers in a university make sense of internationalisation strategies in a role-embedded manner since they are, in the end, strategy recipients. However, the present sub-division is necessary because there are nuances in their sensemaking of internationalisation strategies, especially with regards to cues and schemas, but this will be discussed later on in 7.1.2 and 7.1.3 respectively.

Prospective students deserve special mention because they do not have a role and yet actively make sense of the university's internationalisation strategies. This finding is significant in that non-leaders do not have to already be a member of the university to make sense of it, as long as they (a) have a stake in it and therefore motivation to make sense, and (b) in some ways will act upon the meaning made and alter the organisation (e.g. make an application) later on. My literature review did not yield any studies dealing with this kind of pre-organisation sensemakers and their prospective sensemaking, but my data is neither substantial enough to examine them indepth. Nonetheless, the data shows that these sensemakers do exist and are eventually impactful to the organisation. The present finding resonates with Sandberg and Tsoukas' (2015) call for exploration of what they term *second-order* sensemaking, which is sensemaking done by extra-organisational sensemakers, particularly 'public inquiry reports' (p. 23) into how intra-organisational sensemakers have made sense of a past crisis.

Interestingly, moreover, the data shows that students conduct more pre-entry sensemaking than deans and lecturers. In fact, only after discovering students' considerable pre-entry sensemaking did I go over deans and lecturers' accounts to find similar sensemaking, which did come up (it would have been improbable for them to apply for a job blind) but the details were scant. One instance found was that B_L3_EC saw *Blue's* ad on an employment website, which she found professional, and sent her application right after. A plausible explanation implied by the data is that students have much more stakes in their future university compared to deans and lecturers, so they are more inclined to engage in pre-entry sensemaking.

As a whole, middle managers like deans and frontliners like lecturers and students are not novel to sensemaking research (although frontliners are for SAP and strategic management research, where this study is also positioned, but this will be discussed later in 7.2). However, previous sensemaking researchers have tended to investigate each group in isolation rather

than juxtaposing them. For example, Prior et al. (2018) study the sensemaking of 'frontline employee' (p. 79) in complex procurements, and Balogun and Johnson (2005) study changes in middle managers' schemas over a restructuring initiative. While these studies generate great insights into the sensemaking of each group, they clearly do not show how and why one group's sensemaking is different from another's. It is also difficult to conduct cross-study analysis in order to tease out intergroup differences, because each study looks at a unique sensemaking subject (e.g. a procurement deal versus firm restructuring) in a unique organisation, not to mention the authors' varied application of sensemaking theory.

It is thus extremely difficult to relate my study to existing sensemaking research even in a contrasting manner as done in 7.1.1.1, because my study simultaneously examines the sensemaking of middle managers (deans) and two groups of frontliners (lecturers and students) about a single subject (internationalisation strategies). That said, it is clear from the data that university non-leader groups have distinct modes of sensemaking (role-embedded or non-role embedded) when making sense of their university's internationalisation strategies, and that each mode is strongly tied to one of the two role archetypes: strategy driver and strategy recipient. As shall be seen below, the two modes of sensemaking are only one intergroup difference; Section 7.1.2 to 7.1.5 will examine other differences.

#### 7.1.1.4. Answering the research question: The first step

Up to this point the discussion has provided an initial answer to my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* In brief, internationalisation strategies can be made sense in two different modes: role-embedded and non-role embedded, which respectively correspond to the two formal roles that university non-leaders can be assigned with: strategy recipient and strategy driver. When internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is embedded in role sensemaking, it occurs implicitly and in the context of the mundane, routine organisational reality that non-leaders experience when fulfilling their roles. When it is not, it can take on a role-defining and prospective nature.

### 7.1.2. Intergroup issue 2: Cue sources and access

While role-embeddedness is my central finding about how university internationalisation strategies are made sense of by non-leaders, the data shows complexities and nuances beyond whether non-leaders' sensemaking is role-embedded or non-role embedded. This section and the next (7.1.3) will discuss two such complexities, starting with cues (Weick, 1995; Maitlis, 2005) or more precisely the sources which non-leaders extract cues from.

The data shows that cues are not extracted from an indistinct, singular environment as often described by sensemaking scholars (Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), but from

distinct sources that are characterised by the type of cues or information they provide. In this way, the sources that one sensemaker can uniquely access will differentiate his/her sensemaking from another's. This section will discuss two cue sources that university non-leaders utilise to make sense of internationalisation strategies, and how non-leaders' different roles grant them varying access to these sources.

#### 7.1.2.1. Sources of cues

Each non-leader group in this study had access to distinct sources of cues, which unsurprisingly provided them with different cues about internationalisation strategies. For instance, *Blue* deans possessed strategic documents and were formally aware of what *Blue* internationalisation strategies were. *Blue* lecturers and students, in comparison, were knowledgeable of how the strategies were actually done at the frontline thanks to the daily, mundane lectures or extra-curricular activities they participated in. The cues sources found in the data are numerous, but when aggregated they reveal a categorical pattern according to the content of the cues they provide:

- One type of sources provides cues about internationalisation strategies themselves, e.g. strategic documents, announcement of a strategic initiative. Henceforth this will be called *source-strat*.
- Another provides cues about the realisation or manifestation of the strategies in tasks and experiences, e.g. a lecture, a programme, interaction with other university members (non-leaders and leaders alike). The second source will be called *source-tne* (short form for tasks and experiences).
- The last type provides cues about matters that are unrelated to the strategies but beneficial to making sense of them, e.g. personal connections, scholarship in one's own discipline, national law. The last source will now be called *source-other*.

Apart from content, these types of cue sources differ in purpose. The data shows that source-strat and source-tne are central to making sense of internationalisation strategies, whereas source-other is brought in for justification or rationalisation of the success or failure of the strategies. For instance, the limited success of *Turnitin* at *Blue* was attributed to low awareness of plagiarism among Vietnamese students and lecturers. In certain situations, however, source-other can be greatly conducive to internationalisation-strategy sensemaking, such as when R_MM_CS was able to make progress with the *ABET* initiative thanks to his personal contact in another university, which had attained *ABET*. That said, there is not enough data to discuss when source-other can be of such usefulness, but it is seemingly so when it involves personal connections to knowledgeable others, as was the case for R_MM_CS and also B_MM_EC, who invited his friend (also a renown academic) to present at one *Blue Research Seminar*. Therefore, this section will mostly focus on source-strat and source-tne.

A closer look at source-strat and source-tne reveals differences not only in content but also in their location and how cues can be extracted from them. Source-strat is more likely to be found in management spaces (e.g. deans' office, meeting room) and cues are extracted by cognitive, discursive means (e.g. reading and discussing a document). By contrast, source-tne is common at the frontline where the university's strategies are transformed into concrete activities, and the cues are more experienced and lived than thought or talked of. This distinction has important implications. First, in order to comprehensively make sense of internationalisation strategies, a non-leader must either be present in both management spaces and at the frontline, or be provided with cues that he/she lacks. However, the provision of missing cues can be problematic for source-tne. Because cues from it are mostly gathered in an experiential manner, they cannot be easily provided as-is to another person but have to be first transformed into narratives, and since their experiencing is likely to vary among individuals, there can be many narratives of the same source-tne cues (see also Weick, 2005 about *distributed sensemaking*). The second implication, therefore, is that any recipients of source-tne might need to gather and synthesise multiple narratives to approximate as accurately as possible the original cues. This was exactly what B_MM_LC did when he hosted weekly lunches with students to catch up on the frontline of his faculty. Having access to both source-strat and source-tne has indeed been found to help strategy drivers like B_MM_LC. For example, his colleague B_MM_EC decided to pursue research for his first term after seeing the lack of research and research capacity among staff (source-tne) despite research being a component strategy (source-strat). B_MM_LC himself attached great value to source-tne and made a point of staying close to the frontline where he could discover issues and fix them.

With source-strat and source-tne established, it is now necessary to examine their access by non-leaders in various formal roles to understand how, apart from modes of sensemaking, different university non-leader groups made sense of the same strategy differently.

#### 7.1.2.2. Role archetypes and access to cue sources

The access to source-strat and source-tne is dependent on which role archetypes and sub-types non-leaders are assigned with in the university (refer back to 7.1.1.3 for role descriptions). It follows that one cue source is also more associated with either role-embedded or non-role embedded mode of sensemaking.

To start with, the data shows source-strat is best accessed by strategy drivers, followed by strategy implementers. Strategy drivers need and are granted access to source-strat so that they can choose which internationalisation strategies to drive and at the same time define what they will do in the university. Strategy implementers, by comparison, do not find source-strat necessary because their tasks are already well-defined and therefore are their primary concern, but they have access to source-strat anyway in the form of strategic

meetings with top management, which is part of the role. More importantly, the data suggests that the source-strat accessed by strategy implementers is significantly more ad-hoc than that by strategy drivers. B_MM_EC and B_MM_LC, both being strategy drivers, were carefully briefed about and/or provided with *Blue's* corporate strategy before they started their post. By contrast, the source-strat of R_MM1_BS and R_MM_CS was mainly meetings with *Red* top management, and each meeting often addressed only one internationalisation strategy or even one aspect of a strategy (e.g. a meeting may focus on opening joint programmes with a new partner institution). It was thus up to *Red* deans to link the ad-hoc information they had gained to establish whole strategies, as said by R_MM_CS: 'You can connect [the VC's] ideas and figure out the whole [strategy]'. As a consequence, the resulting strategic knowledge of *Red* deans was unlikely to be as comprehensive as that of *Blue* deans. Lastly, source-strat can be accessed by strategy followers, but this requires them to be in special organisational positions that afford them access. For example, one student in *Red* (R_S2_IE) studied under the VC and heard his plans for a new campus, or two others (R_S1_CS; R_S2_CS) were members of the *Youth Organisation* and thus worked closely with top management, from whom they gained strategic information. Alternatively, strategy followers can access source-strat when assigned special tasks that involves formal knowledge of internationalisation strategies. This was evident by *Red* lecturers in *CS* when they had to write reports for *ABET*. To fulfil this task they needed to analyse *CS'* teaching, research and operations in relation to *Red's* corporate strategy, which they were provided with. That said, the data indicates strategy followers do not pay attention to cues from source-strat, perceiving them as unnecessary.

Given the strongest link with strategy drivers, source-strat corresponds to the non-role embedded mode of internationalisation-strategy sensemaking. It enables non-leaders to make sense of internationalisation strategies explicitly and in their own rights, rather than implicitly through tasks and experiences.

Source-tne is best accessed by strategy followers, followed by strategy implementers and drivers. Stationed at the frontline, strategy followers are constantly gathering cues about internationalisation strategies through internationalisation-related tasks and experiences. Though not at the frontline, strategy implementers similarly relied on cues extracted from the tasks and experiences that deal with internationalisation, which in their case consist of daily administration and the occasional strategic initiatives (e.g. the *ABET* initiative). As to strategy drivers, they need source-tne to supplement source-strat during role definition; that is, they need to grasp how internationalisation strategies are being realised on the ground in order to devise appropriate initiatives. Source-tne is also necessary when they implement their own initiatives as it provides feedback on their ideas and more generally management style: 'The campus provides the most raw and real picture.' (B_MM_LC). The way strategy drivers access source-tne, however, is not the same as strategy followers or implementers: It tends to be second-hand. The data shows strategy drivers often have to rely on managerial observation or accounts from strategy followers, who have first-hand access to source-tne,

because it would be difficult if not impossible for strategy drivers to be at the frontline all the time and experientially gather cues from it. This is especially so at the beginning of their post, when strategy drivers are yet able to engage substantially with the frontline. For example, B_MM_LC could not experience what he called 'rampant' plagiarism but only observed it, simply because he was not a student writing a paper or lecturer marking one. In a similar way, B_MM_EC did not have first-hand information of *Turnitin* making contact with *Blue* to offer a trial, but instead was told about the offer by a librarian. Strategy drivers can better access first-hand source-tne when carrying out their own initiatives (e.g. B_MM_EC organised and ran *Blue Research Seminars* himself). Even then, I would argue that they might still need source-tne from strategy followers' perspective to see how the latter receive the initiatives. For example, B_MM_EC did not receive any feedback about *Turnitin* until I told him my findings in a member-checking interview. He could have possibly adjusted the implementation of *Turnitin* by, say, making sure the library focused more on plagiarism instead of just *Turnitin* usage.

It can be seen that source-tne corresponds more to the role-embedded mode of internationalisation-strategy sensemaking, most often found with strategy followers. This type of cue source does not let non-leaders make sense of internationalisation strategies themselves, but it shows how the strategies are realised and reflected in the daily, mundane tasks and experiences at the frontline.

The idea that there can be multiple types of cues and cue sources has been examined, albeit implicitly, in several studies about the practices for conducting sensemaking and sensegiving, from which it can be inferred that cues can physically exist as language (Nicholson & Anderson, 2005; Sonenshein, 2010; Cornelissen, 2012), sociomateriality (Kaplan, 2011; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012) or physio-psychological stimulation (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Liu & Maitlis, 2014). A close reading, however reveals very little discussion related to cues beyond their physical nature. For example, while it can be inferred from Sonenshein's study (2010) that cues exist as language, specifically managerial narratives, the author does not discuss why certain cues were included or excluded in these narratives. In my literature survey, there are only two sensemaking studies with an explicit focus on cues: One is by Gacasan et al. (2016) (see also Gacasan & Wiggins, 2017), which looks at construction project managers' use of cues during critical incidents. The researchers found three types of cues, including feedback, context cues and tacit knowledge. The other study is by Svensson and Hallgren (2018), who examined Swedish emergency call operators' reaction to verbal and non-verbal cues. Their findings reveal that incongruence between verbal and non-verbal cues lead the operators to pay more attention to the latter. It is therefore very interesting to see that, though a core concept (Weick, 1995), cues have rarely been a focus for analysis by sensemaking scholars. Most of the time, cues are compressed and reduced to being an indistinct, singular ingredient taken from an indistinct, singular *environment* for meaning making. A good example is Balogun's study on middle management's sensemaking of strategic change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). A lot of cues and cue

sources can be teased out from their findings and actually fit my classification of source-strat and source-tne; these are, to name a few, communication exercises like videos, vision workshops (source-strat), being placed in new positions and working for longer hours (source-tne), experiencing 'defense of turf' during daily work (one cue from source-tne). However, no analysis is provided by the authors themselves of the cues or cue sources, such as why videos were chosen as a source or how middle managers gathered cues during the change.

Like Gacasan et al. (2016) and Svensson and Hallgren (2018), my study has treated cues in more depth than previous research. My findings demonstrate that cues are not readily taken from an indistinct, singular 'environment' as often found in extant sensemaking writings (e.g. Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 67). On the contrary, they come from different sources, which can at least be distinguished based on the content they provide about the subject of sensemaking (e.g. internationalisation strategies) or on the location of origin. More importantly, it is such distinction that enables an examination of how non-leader groups each access and utilise cue sources, which has the potential to explain differences in the conduct of sensemaking and the resulting meanings across groups of university non-leaders.

The above discussion about cue sources and access also expands my findings about intergroup sensemaking differences, introduced in 7.1.1.3, by adding access to cue sources as another role-based differentiating element (besides modes of sensemaking) between the sensemaking of university non-leaders.

#### 7.1.2.3. Answering the research question: The second step

The discussion around cue sources and access has greatly helped develop the answer to my research question. It demonstrates that university internationalisation strategies are made sense of not only in two different modes: role-embedded and non-role embedded, but also with two types of cue sources: source-strat and source-tne. Source-strat, like strategic meetings, provides cues about internationalisation strategies themselves and can be found in management spaces. Cues are extracted from source-strat in a cognitive and discursive manner (e.g. reading, discussing). In comparison, source-tne, like a lecture, provides cues about the realisation or manifestation of the strategies in tasks and experiences and is common at the frontline. Cues are extracted from source-tne experientially; in other words, the sensemaker experiences internationalisation rather than reading about it.

### 7.1.3. Intergroup issue 3: Schemas

The third and last intergroup sensemaking issue is schemas, or cognitive frames (Labianca, Gray, & Brass, 2000; Bingham & Kahl, 2013). The data shows that each of non-leaders' role archetypes and sub-types is associated with a kind of framing of internationalisation

strategies. For instance, strategy drivers frame the strategies within their beliefs about what universities should be; this was evident by B_MM_EC, who believed that research was essential to the identity of a university and thus chose research as the component strategy to drive in *EC*. This schema is not present in any other roles. In addition, it has been found that (a) there are meso and macro-level institutional influences in the content of non-leaders' schemas, and (b) schemas can predict how strategy followers will act in general and by extension what outcomes they create for a strategy. This section will focus on university non-leaders' schemas, in relation with role archetypes, institutions and enactment trajectory.

#### 7.1.3.1. Role archetypes and schema

Despite individual differences, university non-leaders in each role archetype and sub-type appear to share a unique theme in the content of their schemas. Strategy drivers make sense of internationalisation strategies according to their own prescription about universities. For example, B_MM_EC considered research the core of any universities, while B_MM_LC greatly cared about academic integrity, particularly the fight against the plagiarism 'disease'. In comparison, strategy implementers' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies, or more accurately of the administrative tasks and occasional initiatives that reflect the strategies (role-embedded sensemaking), is framed by their beliefs about the best approach to managing these tasks and initiatives. For instance, R_MM_CS made a point of leading by example; he would spring first into action and engage in the very tasks and initiatives he had to manage (e.g. he attended *ABET* workshops like everyone else). Lastly, the schemas of strategy followers are very diverse, but most of them have a utilitarian nature. Both *Blue* and *Red* lecturers perceived internationalisation-related tasks and experiences (role-embedded sensemaking) in terms of financial, professional or personal gain. The students, on the other hand, always tried to find the most facile way to complete their tasks.

Nonetheless, the data offers no clear explanation for these role-schema associations (the links are clearer between roles, modes of sensemaking and cues). It can only be inferred, through examining the features of each role archetype and sub-type, that non-leaders utilise the above schemas because they best assist them in fulfilling their roles. Take strategy drivers as an example, the strategic agency and low task specificity of their role mean they are faced with great ambiguity, especially at the start of their post when they have to decide on which component strategy to drive in their faculties. The logical first step for strategy drivers then is to make sense of the university's corporate strategy and component strategies, and this entails processing a large amount of cues from numerous sources, both source-strat and source-tne. Therefore, they need a schema that can help them assess which cues and in turn which strategies should be focused on, and because they are driving strategies for a *university*, it can be strongly argued that the schema content has to enable them to assess which strategies are most necessary for universities and not other organisations. This problem, understandably, touches on strategy drivers' beliefs about what universities should be.

The utilitarian schemas of strategy followers, in particular, appear to echo the *principal-agent problem* (e.g. Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Mitnick, 2006). Strategy followers can be considered agents of internationalisation strategies, whose interests (in this study) are not exactly aligned with those of the principals of the strategies (top management and strategy driver deans). According to the principal-agent problem, strategy followers will be more likely than not to act in their interests, which creates deviant or null outcomes for the strategic intents of top management and strategy driver deans. Thus, the principals can combat this problem by installing incentivising (Yang, 1991) or deterrent mechanisms (Eisenhardt, 1989b), both of which were notably missing with the strategic initiatives at *Blue*. Indeed, B_L1_EC figuratively said that without 'carrot' or 'stick' no lecturers would want to do research, while B_L3_EC complained: 'Do I get an award for [observing the 20% threshold] or intense animosity and retaliation against my supervisees?'.

The role-based variation in schema content among groups once again expands my findings about intergroup sensemaking differences (7.1.1.3) by adding schema as a differentiating factor between university non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies.

### 7.1.3.2. Institutions and schema content

One notable finding of this study is the clear presence of institutions in the content of university non-leaders' schemas. Here institutions are understood as the 'material practices' and 'cultural symbols [like] assumptions, values, beliefs' (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012, p. 2) that shape how individuals and organisations make meaning and act (i.e. sensemaking). Most of the participants were more or less affected by such practices and symbols. For example, B_MM_LC's beliefs about what universities should be were influenced by his exposure to American universities during his PhD: 'My programme opened my eyes to the values of a university'. Elsewhere, every *Red* lecturer found EMI a must for *Red* to claim itself an international university, because the English language is 'the international language'; in addition, those in *Computer Science* cited that English is the language of their field. Lastly, nearly all students attributed their adaptation schemas to prior schooling, where they had been taught to conform, and some *Red* students considered employers' bias towards Western degrees a motivation to pursue a joint programme, even one involving no time abroad or teaching by the partner institution. These instances show that the schema content is not only tied to non-leaders' role archetypes and sub-types, but also shaped by institutions at the meso (organisational) and macro (extra-organisational, field, societal) levels. As can be seen from the aforementioned examples, strategy drivers' framing of universities can be shaped by institutional forces relating to the ideal university, in this case modelled after a well-known system (e.g. American universities). Strategy followers' schemas can be shaped by societal expectations of their behaviours (e.g. students must conform), the labour market (e.g. a Western degree is better) or the features of their professional field (e.g. English is *the* language of computer science), or by the image of the organisation they are

members of (e.g. *Red* must have a certain strategy because of its claim of being international).

Beyond the existence of institutions in university non-leaders' schemas, the data does not say much about the mechanisms for these influences to become ingrained. There are only three mechanisms evidenced, but without much substance: One is students' prior schooling, which was cited by almost all *Blue* and *Red* students as the origin of their adaptation schemas: 'We have all been taught to conform in Vietnam. You know, the teacher is always right' (B_S2_LC). The other is remuneration and promotion structure, mentioned by *Blue* lecturers in *Economics and Commerce* when describing the 'teaching culture' at *Blue* (B_L2_EC); this culture was their frame for making sense of research (they paid attention to the lack of incentives for research) and *Turnitin* (they were concerned with receiving bad student feedback, which would affect pay and promotion, for failing a paper crossing the 20% *Turnitin* threshold). The last one is corporate communication. *Red* was very active in communicating and branding its international elements (5.1.2), and this international brand was often referred to by *Red* lecturers as the background and reason of being for certain internationalisation strategies.

In a conceptual paper, Weber and Glynn (2006) propose that institutions have three effects on sensemaking: priming, editing and triggering. According to the authors, institutions of a certain context can prime the sensemaker by limiting the schemas to be used, in accordance with the 'appropriate institutional norm' of that context (p. 1648). Alternatively, institutions can retrospectively and indirectly edit the meaning of past actions; that is, they shape the expectations by other people of the sensemaker's own actions, and if these expectations are violated, the sensemaker will receive negative feedback that compels him/her to reassess that past actions giving rise to the feedback. Lastly, institutions themselves might trigger and become the focus for sensemaking. Based on Weber and Glynn's framework, it can be seen that the institutional influences found in this study all have a priming effect on sensemaking because they dictate the content of university non-leaders' schemas. With all that said, the authors offer little discussion on the mechanisms for institutions to affect schemas. Apart from Weber and Glynn's (2006) paper, not much has been done into institutions by sensemaking scholars (another notable study is by Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010), and indeed institutions have long been identified a gap in sensemaking theory (Magala, 1997; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Consequently, there is little empirical evidence of institutional influences on sensemaking, and sensemaking theory as a whole has been critiqued as 'subjectivistic' (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. 20) or 'hyper-agentic' (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 98) for positioning the power to interpret the world and enact meaning within the sensemaker, without much consideration of constraints posed by institutions or power and politics (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

### 7.1.3.3. Strategy followers' schema-task congruence and enactment of task outcomes

The distinction between sensemaking and interpretation is that the former involves both meaning making, like interpretation, and the actions that enact meaning (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Of all the role archetypes and sub-types of university non-leaders, strategy follower presents perhaps the most compelling subject for examining enactment. Because strategy followers directly and constantly carry out tasks that realise internationalisation strategies, the meaning they make of tasks and how they enact that meaning made will create the most concrete, tangible outcomes for internationalisation strategies. For instance, while B_MM_EC helped push *Blue's* research strategy by devising his three initiatives, it was the actions of his staff that determined whether and what outcomes were achieved by attending *Blue Research Seminar*, opting in for the *research-lecturer* contract and most importantly learning and doing research. However, the dean himself also carried out his own initiatives by teaching in *Blue Research Seminars* and evaluating the performance of *research lecturers*. Another example is that *Red's* joint programme strategy would never have been realised without students enrolling in joint programmes and qualifying in time for the transfer stage, and in order to do so they had to make sense of joint programmes. In this way, I would argue that large-scale analyses of strategy followers' enactment of task outcomes might help predict strategic outcomes. This section, however, only examines strategy followers' enactment on a small scale of individual tasks.

The most outstanding finding about strategy followers' enactment is that it corresponds strongly to the congruence between their schemas and the task specifications, of which there can be four scenarios. First, the data shows that enacted outcomes are in line with the specifications of a task if the cues around that task (mostly coming from source-tne, to add) fit strategy followers' schemas. Second, when congruence is not found, strategy followers enact outcomes that both fulfil a task and are compatible with their schemas. Such outcomes, however, are likely to deviate from and compromise said task. Third and fourth, where compromise is not even feasible, strategy followers withdraw from the task (flight) or attempt to change it (fight). As found in this study, if change attempt is successful, a whole strategy can be altered; this was evident when *Red* joint students fought *langcen's* courses, which led to the VC making all these courses optional, thus altering how the EMI strategy was implemented for joint students. Both flight and fight are understandably deviant, unintended outcomes of a task. Table 14 on the next page provides illustrative evidence of the four scenarios above.

*Table 14*. Four scenarios of strategy followers' schema-task congruence

| | **Congruence** | **Non-congruence** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Congruence seeking** | **Flight** | **Fight** |
| **Sensemaker and task** | *Blue* students and getting *CEFR-B1* certified in a second foreign language | *Red* lecturers in *Computer Science* and teaching in English | *Blue* students and getting *CEFR-B1* certified in English and/or a second foreign language | *Red* joint students and English courses at *langcen* |
| **Schemas applied** | Facile adaptation | • Disciplinary feature (English is the language of computer science)<br>• Institutional feature (English is key to *Red's* identity)<br>• Educational effectiveness | • Facile adaptation<br>• A university education is a means to employment | Facile adaptation |
| **Cues about task** | There are four languages to choose from: Chinese, Japanese, Korean and French. Chinese is the easiest to get a *CEFR-B1* certification. | Students' command of English is not good enough to learn wholly in English. This presents a dilemma: Switching to Vietnamese violates disciplinary feature and institutional feature (and regulation). Continuing to teach in English is not effective. | • Repeated failures to get certified in English and/or a second foreign language<br>• Desirable employment found without a degree or *Blue's* mandated language certificate | • Taking all *langcen* courses would delay the transfer severely and as a consequence prolong the programme unnecessarily<br>• Low teaching quality and questionable financial practices<br>• *Langcen* courses were compulsory – i.e. adaptation was not feasible |
| **Specific action taken** | Learn Chinese | Switch to Vietnamese only when necessary, e.g. students show confusion<br>Action reinforced by further cues:<br>• No objection from students to lecturers switching to Vietnamese if done sparingly<br>• No reported penalty for language switch | Give up getting a language certificate, even when this means forfeiting graduation | Demand *langcen* courses to become optional |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Other examples** | B_L1_EC quickly opted into the research-lecturer contractual scheme after its introduction. She also actively attended *Blue Research Seminars* and had her own research group. Her passion for research (schema) was congruent with the push for research by her dean (cues). | *Red* students had to pay for private tutoring in Vietnamese to cope with modules they could not learn in English, meaning adaptation (schema) was not possible given their own English competence of that of the lecturers (cues). | | |

It can be seen from the table that all four scenarios of schema-task congruence are underpinned by tensions between what strategy followers are supposed to do and their schemas. Therefore, by enacting an organisational reality that fits their schemas, strategy followers are reducing these tensions between action and thoughts. This echoes the very popular *cognitive dissonance theory* (Hinojosa et al. 2017; McGrath, 2017), which states that when people are confronted with conflict or dissonance between cognition and attitude (what they think and feel) and behaviour (what they do), they try to reduce dissonance by *inter alia* altering their cognition and attitude or behaviour. In the three non-congruence scenarios presented, strategy followers are confronted with a dissonance between the way they think and feel, represented by their schemas, and what they are doing, represented by the task they are engaging in (and gathering cues from). Even when task-schema congruence is found, strategy followers might still face a hypothetical dissonance if they have multiple courses of action to choose from and some (e.g. learning French instead of Chinese). Thus, according to cognitive dissonance theory, it is easy to see why strategy followers enact task outcomes in line with their schemas. However, it is interesting that the reverse – altering schemas to fit task is not found in this study, considering schema change exists in the sensemaking literature (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004), though not originating from cognitive dissonance. One plausible explanation is that, at least in this study, schema alteration does not serve the interests of university strategy followers as much as task outcome alteration, because their schemas are already often self-interested, as discussed earlier in 7.1.3.1. Indeed, the cognitive dissonance literature seem to suggest that people change whichever is in their best interests. For instance, Ashforth et al. (2007) demonstrate that employees in stigmatised professions change their attitudes to make work feel more favourable. By contrast, in their review Hinojosa et al. (2017) find that fund managers or journalists change their behaviour to suit CEOs who have 'ingratiated' (p.187) them.

The enactment of task outcomes based on self-interested schemas is very likely to result in deviant and unintended outcomes (as shown by Table 14), unless there is alignment between the interests of strategy followers and strategists (e.g. top management, strategy driver deans). This ties back to the principal-agent problem mentioned in 7.1.3.1. However, it is possible for deviant outcomes to actually benefit the university, such as *Red* lecturers' language switch without which students would have had little comprehension of the subject matter being taught.

Nonetheless, there was one single instance in this study where schema-task tension was not found: B_L1_EC and the three research initiatives. The initiatives were not only congruent with her schema (research being a passion) but in fact productively resonant with it. More specifically, the initiatives created structures for B_L1_EC to engage in research, in the form of venue (*Blue Research Seminar*) and research-based remuneration and promotion (the new *research-lecturer* contractual scheme and associated performance evaluation). This was not to mention her dean was a strong believer in research and persistent in communicating its importance. B_L1_EC was thus able to enact extra outcomes for the three initiatives: She took

advantage of all three to bring her existing research activity outside *Blue* into the university and on top of this created her own research group with participation from other lecturers. B_L1_EC's schema-task congruence and highly constructive enactment reflect the well-documented *organizational citizenship behaviour* (OCB) phenomenon in organisation and psychology research (see Podsakoff et al., 2014; Ocampo et al., 2018; Organ, 2018 for an overview). OCB is defined as a group of behaviours that are discretionary and beyond one's duties and that promote the effecting functioning of the organisation (Organ, 1988; Organ, 1997). These behaviours are numerous and OCB writers have created their own elaborated and often overlapping categorisation (e.g. Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000). For the purpose of this study, however, B_L1_EC's enactment best corresponds to what is called *change-related OCB* (Dewett & Denisi, 2007), which includes 'improvement-related' (p. 246) behaviours or personal initiatives that move an organisation forward. Moreover, the congruence between her passion-for-research schema and the research initiatives mirrors what has been found in OCB research as perceived fit and identification with the organisation (Ocampo et al., 2018), which is an antecedent of OCB. The *research-lecturer* contractual scheme itself and B_MM_EC's enthusiastic push for research also reflect two other antecedents, HR practices and transformational leadership (ibid.). Thus, OCB theory offers valuable insights into situations of schema-task congruence where there is little tension and the enacted task outcomes are more than intended.

The schemas of frontliners like university strategy followers' and their link to enactment, as discussed above, is yet to be examined in extant sensemaking research. Although schema has received considerable attention in the literature, it is rather confined to the context of strategic change, where it is one of if not the central construct. Sensemaking researchers have been interested in top management's attempts to shape other stakeholders' schemas in favour of a change (Bean & Hamilton, 2006; Sonenshein, 2010; Ma & Seidl, 2017), as well as change recipients' adjustment of their schemas (Bean & Hamilton, 2006; Balogun & Johnson, 2005). In particular, Mantere et al. (2012) undertook an interesting study into the success of top management to shape recipients' schemas around a merger, and their struggle later on to reverse the schemas when the merger was cancelled. Another sensemaking area where schema is an important construct is managerial decision-making (Sleegers et al., 2009; Winch & Maytorena, 2009; Hahn et al., 2014). My study, in comparison, investigates schema from an opposite and novel perspective: frontliners making sense of mundane, routine tasks (also refer back to 7.1.1.1). Incorporating cognitive dissonance and agency theory, it shows how tension can arise out of incongruence between the largely self-interested schemas of frontliners, specifically university strategy followers, and the actions they supposedly take to fulfil a given task. Indeed, tension may arise even when there is congruence, albeit hypothetically. University strategy followers thus try to reduce this tension by constructing and enacting outcomes that both fulfil the task and fit their schemas, which are likely deviant from the intent of strategists. Conversely, my study has also found that without this tension and given structural support and leadership, university strategy followers may engage in change-related OCB (Dewett and Denisi, 2007), enacting extra outcomes for tasks.

#### 7.1.3.4. Answering the research question: The third step

Findings about schemas yet again expands the answer to my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* That is, internationalisation strategies are made sense of with the schemas that best serve each non-leader group's formal role. Strategy drivers devise their strategic initiatives against their view of what universities are and should be. Strategy implementers are more pragmatic and frame internationalisation strategies within their beliefs about management; this is because internationalisation strategies to them are specific administrative tasks or top-down initiatives that they have to carry out. Strategy followers have diverse schemas, but most are utilitarian; they judge internationalisation strategies in terms of benefits to their livelihood and professional development (for lecturers) or employability (for students). Indeed, schemas provide a powerful tool to explain strategy followers' actions towards internationalisation-related tasks. Nonetheless, the schemas of all university non-leaders similarly contain institutional influences that constrain their sensemaking.

### 7.1.4. Group-specific issues

So far this chapter has discussed three sensemaking issues that run across all university non-leader groups but manifest differently in each group: role-embeddedness, cue sources and access, and schemas. The discussion around each issue has substantially addressed the research question by illustrating how deans, lecturers and students make sense of internationalisation strategies with different modes of sensemaking, cue sources and schemas, depending on their role archetypes and sub-types. Nonetheless, the data shows there are other sensemaking issues that are specific to deans, lecturers or students and that may or may not also relate to their role archetypes and sub-types. It is necessary, therefore, to discuss these issues in order to exhaust the data and in turn generate a more comprehensive answer to the research question and explore additional contributions to sensemaking theory. This section discusses sensemaking issues unique to deans (7.1.4.1), lecturers (7.1.4.2) and students (7.1.4.3).

#### 7.1.4.1. Deans' frontline engagement

The unique feature of deans' sensemaking is their hands-on engagement with the frontline. All the deans in this study executed the very tasks that they laid out for strategy followers, in order to implement their own strategic initiatives or top-down ones. This is likely because, as the data reveals, there are clear benefits to frontline engagement for both deans of strategy driver and implementer role. First, it enables them to enact their own ideas. B_MM_EC organised *Blue Research Seminars* himself and taught research methodology for the first half of each session. R_MM_CS, by comparison, not only coordinated work for the *ABET* initiative but also attended training workshops with his staff. Second, it provides feedback for their ideas and more generally management style. B_MM_EC assessed the effectiveness of his push for research by observing participation in *Blue Research Seminars*, while R_MM_CS said

working and playing 'closely' with staff enabled him to understand their 'morale' and see if they were 'with [him]'. Third, it provides them with source-tne, albeit second-hand. B_MM_LC valued being at the frontline because the campus 'the most raw and real picture' of strategies, so much that he hosted weekly lunches with students to listen to situations on the ground. Finally, frontline engagement may inspire new ideas, especially for strategy driver deans. B_MM_EC's purchase of *Turnitin* was inspired by his conversation with a librarian about preventing plagiarism, from which he learned *Turnitin* had contacted *Blue* before and offered a trial.

Deans' frontline engagement can be conceptualised as an umbrella term for any enactment that involves hands-on execution of their own ideas via frontline tasks (see also studies on *management by walking around*, e.g. Tucker & Singer, 2015). Enactment by middle managers like university deans is obscure in the sensemaking literature. The only studies that arguably deal with it are those about communication and sensegiving (Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Sharma & Good, 2013), because with communication middle managers can indirectly enact their preferred meaning by 'selling' it (Rouleau, 2005) to others (mostly frontliners) and instil actions. For example, one middle manager in Rouleau (2005) enacted his clothing company's turn to the mass market by presenting a new mass-market oriented collection to fashion journalists, who would write about it for the public. Frontline engagement as found in this study, however, differs from communication in that middle managers realise the very meaning they want to sell, rather than selling it. This means they have direct control over the outcomes and can quickly gain feedback for their ideas, as well as gather first-hand any cues for further sensemaking. In this way, it strongly appears that frontline engagement is closer than communication to the original conceptualisation of enactment by Weick (1995; Weick et al., 2005), which states that the sensemaker takes actions that alters the surrounding environment and generates cues for sensemaking.

#### 7.1.4.2. The political dimension of lecturers' sensemaking

One outstanding issue of lecturers' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is the influence of workplace micro-politics. Although the data does not say much about this issue, any available accounts are candid. Workplace politics were consistently referred to B_L3_EC as great constraints on her sensemaking. More specifically, she (and reportedly many colleagues) kept attending *Blue Research Seminars* out of respect for B_MM_EC as 'he was a good dean and scholar', even though she had to give up teaching hours to do so, which was detrimental to her income. As to *Turnitin*, potential animosity and retaliation from other lecturers was part of the reason she did not observe the 20% threshold when marking their students' dissertations. Similarly, B_L2_EC briefly mentioned 'an unspoken rule' in her department with regards to not failing papers crossing the threshold. On top of this, B_L3_EC said that even her own students held political power over her because they could tell others not to 'ask [her] for supervision or enrol in [her] classes', which might then cause her head of department to question her performance. From B_L3_EC's accounts, it can be seen that a

lecturer's sensemaking of internationalisation strategies is affected by perceived power dynamics with every other university non-leader group in this study. Such power dynamics often result in tension between what lecturers want to do (e.g. stop attending *Blue Research Seminars*) or think that they should do (e.g. failing plagiarising students) and what they have to do to cater to significant others; in other words, politics may cause cognitive dissonance (see 7.1.3.3). The resolution of this dissonance, as shown by the data, is very likely to result in compromised outcomes for an internationalisation strategy.

The micro-politics of sensemaking have become increasingly more abundant in the literature. In the main, previous research has explored the contestation of meaning and narratives (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008; Vaara & Tienari, 2011); a few studies have also dealt with top and middle managers' political actions during sensemaking and sensegiving (Hope, 2010; Filstad, 2014) or how perception of power shapes sensemaking (Frieder, Ma, & Hochwarter, 2016; Whittle et al., 2016). Power perception is precisely what affected B_L3_EC's sensemaking of *Turnitin*. She avoided upsetting colleagues and students due to their perceived power over her. Similar to Frieder et al. (2016) and Whittle et al. (2016), power perception in her case is prospective; that is, she did not enact certain meanings in anticipation of negative political consequences, rather than because of previous negative political feedback. Apart from power perception, her sensemaking was influenced by another political factor: respect for her dean, B_MM_EC. While yet to be investigated by sensemaking scholars, respect for leaders[40] has been found in the broader management literature as a desirable factor that enhances employees' receptiveness, performance, well-being and job satisfaction (Wolfram et al., 2007; Graf, Quaquebeke, & Dick, 2011; Decker & Quaquebeke, 2015; Clarke & Mahadi, 2017). In B_L3_EC's case, however, it did make her receptive to *Blue Research Seminars*, but at the same time caused tension with her sensemaking of research. Nonetheless, politics and power are an under-researched topic in the sensemaking literature (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015), despite being a long-standing topic in organisation studies and management (Gandz & Murray, 1980; Drory & Romm, 1988). Since Weick's seminal founding work (1995) until his own review ten years later (Weick et al., 2005), sensemaking research was found to be politically 'naïve' (p. 418), and although gaining traction in the 2010s (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), politics is still a topic that deserves more attention (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). This paucity of research into politics in sensemaking ties back to the general issue of sensemaking being 'subjectivistic' (p. 20) or 'hyper-agentic' (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 98), mentioned earlier 7.1.3.2.

### 7.1.4.3. Social media use by students

The last group-specific sensemaking issue is students' use of social media. This study has found that social media is ubiquitous among students as a sensemaking venue, where cues

[40] The word 'leader' in this single instance is in its generic sense as someone who leads, rather than governors or corporate-level managers of universities (vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors), as has been used throughout this study in the phrase 'non-leaders'.

can be shared and gathered, and is extensively used in internationalisation-strategy sensemaking both pre and post-entry. All *Blue* and *Red* students in this study looked up their universities on social media, and indeed a cursory browse of *Blue Confession* and *Red Social* returned many posts by prospective students asking for information about international matters. Post-entry, the students joined various social media communities, ranging from those for all students in *Blue* and *Red* (*Blue Confession*, *Red Social*) to those created for their specific cohorts or one single module, where they could share and discuss their experiences of internationalisation (e.g. trouble with *Turnitin*'s sensitivity, the teaching quality of langcen). By contrast, social media was rarely mentioned during dean and lecturer interviews, except by some *Red* lecturers (e.g. R_L2_CS) who said they read *Red* Social because the VC made it a place for students to voice their concerns (the role of top management in non-leaders' sensemaking will be discussed later). The respective prominence and absence of social media among students and other university non-leader groups can best be explained by demographic traits. The students in this study were all born into what is called *Generation Z*, whose lifestyle is strongly attached to technology, the Internet and social media (Mintel, 2018). On the other hand, the lecturers and deans belonged to *Generation X* or were early *Millennials*, who relied less on those (ibid.). This finding is significant because it establishes a link between the demographics of the sensemaker and his/her sensemaking. However, there is not enough data to discuss this in fuller depth.

With that said, *Blue* and *Red* students' accounts suggest that the two most prominent features of social media as a sensemaking tool are its inclusivity and scalability. Social media connects students from different organisational positions (e.g. faculties, cohorts, programmes) and enables them to communicate with other university stakeholder groups, non-leaders as well as leaders, and even people outside the university like prospective students. Moreover, communication via social media is easily scalable, so one post by any students can reach hundreds of others. For example, one post on *Red Social* about *langcen* received 200 reactions[41] and 30 comments. Thus, social media greatly facilitates collective sensemaking.

There is little prior research into sensemaking with social media. Only recently, a few notable attempts have been done into the role of social media as a sensemaking tool during an organisational crisis (Gruber et al., 2015), revolution (Oh et al., 2015) or extreme event like terrorist attack or plane crash (Steiglitz et al., 2018). These studies all show that social media can mobilise a large number of sensemakers, internal and external to the organisation, and provide them with a means to share a great amount of cues in 'real-time' (Gruber et al., 2015, p. 163), thus corroborating my findings. However, Steiglitz et al. (2018) warn that cues and meaning on social media can be manipulated to spread false information. Another study by Ryden et al. (2015) looks at how social media itself is made sense of as a business tool by

[41] Facebook has a reaction feature that enables readers of a post to express their attitude (e.g. happy, angry, sad). In addition, readers can comment on the post.

senior managers or business owners in retail and service businesses. The students in this study appeared to have been familiar with social media use well before enrolment, evident by their use of it to look up *Blue* and *Red* for their university application.

#### 7.1.4.4. Answering the research question: The fourth step

The findings presented in 7.1.4 has added complexity to the answer to my research question, in that there are sensemaking issues specific to deans, lecturers or students. To start with, both strategy driver and implementer deans engage heavily with the frontline in order to enact their own ideas and gain feedback, or to gather the valuable source-tne and find inspiration. On the other hand, lecturers' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies stands out for its political dimension, which includes perceived power dynamics with colleagues and students, as well as respect for superiors. Lastly, social media is extensively used by students as a venue for making sense of internationalisation strategies.

### 7.1.5. University leaders' empowering role and the final step to answering the research question

Even though this study focuses on university non-leaders, the data shows that leaders (top management in this case) cannot be discounted, because both *Blue* and *Red* VC played a key role in the sensemaking of *Blue* deans and *Red* students, respectively. The VC of *Blue* made a point of communicating the corporate strategy to new deans and, with B_MM_EC, she herself took charge of his recruitment and provided him with a candidacy period to get to know *EC*. More importantly, she viewed deans as strategy drivers rather than implementers or daily administrators, thus giving them the freedom to shape their own roles and at the same time their faculties. Indeed, she even helped broaden the scope of their initiatives beyond faculty boundaries (B_MM_EC's three research initiatives) and *Blue* itself (*Turnitin*). By comparison, *Red* VC was very attentive to student feedback and needs. It was reported that he often visited the canteen to ask students if they were enjoying the food and that he commissioned a roof for the bus stop after noticing students were standing in the sun. That said, the participant students remembered him the most for giving them a voice. He was a frequent reader and poster of *Red Social*, the largest social media community for *Red* students, and had on many occasions resolved issues posted on it. One such issue was the English courses at *langcen*, which he resolved by commenting on the numerous posts about *langcen* and telling the posters to contact him directly by email. Thanks to the VC, the students knew that they could fight to change a task if adaptation were not feasible.

The similarity between the two VCs was their empowering of non-leaders. Empowerment in this study is understood in the simple sense of enabling non-leaders to have 'a greater say' (Labianca et al., 2000, p. 236). *Blue* VC empowered her deans to strategically drive their faculties, with spillover effects on the whole university and even the Vietnamese higher

education sector. By comparison, *Red* VC empowered his students to be his informants and change agents. The impact of empowerment on these non-leaders' sensemaking was also clear. *Blue* deans had the freedom to devise initiatives for internationalisation strategies and enact them, while *Red* students could take collective action upon their interpretation of a task when adaption proved impossible. The empowerment of corporate non-leaders like middle management and employees is a very common and long-standing topic in management research (e.g. Walton, 1985; Denham, Ackers, & Travers, 1997; Joffe & Glynn, 2001; Raelin & Cataldo, 2011), not to mention its association with another very common topic – *transformational leadership* (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015; Banks et al., 2016; Arnold, 2017). In general, empowerment has been found to have positive effects on middle managers, enabling them to become facilitators of organisational change (Raelin & Cataldo, 2011), as well as on employees, improving satisfaction, commitment, creativity and performance (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). With regards to university students, empowerment has also been supported for its potential to transform teaching and learning and to develop strategies (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011). Despite said wealth of empowerment research, there is a paucity of studies into the role of empowerment in sensemaking. The only two that I have found are Labianca et al. (2000) and Nketia (2016); the former examines employees' schema inertia as a barrier to their empowerment as co-designers of an organisational change, and the latter examines how employees' involvement in strategy making increases their sensemaking activity, which then leads to more commitment to strategies. The findings of this study, by comparison, demonstrate that empowered university non-leaders can take advantage of their schemas and cue sources to drive or change internationalisation strategies.

The empowerment of university non-leaders by leaders, and its clear impact on non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies mark the last component and thus final step to answering the research question.

### 7.1.6. Summary of theoretical findings and answering the research question

This chapter has hitherto discussed the seven issues of university non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies that have emerged from the data. These issues are either found with all non-leader groups but manifest differently in each (role-embedded sensemaking, access to cue sources, schema content) or unique to one group (frontline engagement, politics, social media). The involvement of university leaders has also been explored. More specifically, Section 7.1.1, 7.1.2 and 7.1.3 have examined how different role features, aggregating into role archetypes and sub-types, lead university non-leaders to engage in two modes of sensemaking (role-embedded and non-role embedded), with varying access to two sources of cues (source-strat and source-tne) and the application of distinct cognitive frames that might also contain institutional influences. Thereafter, Section 7.1.4 has looked at deans' engagement with the frontline to enact their own ideas and gain feedback or to find inspirations, lecturers' consideration of workplace politics in their

behaviours towards an internationalisation strategy, and finally students' use of social media as a sensemaking and sensegiving venue. Lastly, Section 7.1.5 has discussed the way university leaders empower non-leaders and therefore enable them to capitalise on their schemas and cue sources to more directly shape internationalisation strategies.

All of the theoretical findings from this study are summarised in Table 15 on next page:

*Table 15*. Summary of theoretical findings

| | **Deans** | **Deans** | **Lecturers** | **Students** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Role archetype and features** | **Strategy driver:**<br>• agency and authority to act upon the university's strategies via strategic initiatives that might alter existing structures<br>• low task specificity | **Strategy recipient – implementer:**<br>• little if any agency or authority to act upon the university's strategies<br>• high task specificity<br>• some decision making power over specification of tasks<br>• access to top management | **Strategy recipient – follower:**<br>• little if any agency or authority to act upon the university's strategies<br>• high task specificity<br>• little if any decision making power over specification of tasks | **Strategy recipient – follower:**<br>• little if any agency or authority to act upon the university's strategies<br>• high task specificity<br>• little if any decision making power over specification of tasks |
| **Mode of sensemaking** | **Non-role embedded:**<br>• internationalisation strategies are the focus for sensemaking.<br>• internationalisation strategies are made sense of in their own rights and explicitly, rather than implicitly through tasks and experiences.<br>• internationalisation-strategy sensemaking can be used to define one's role. | **Role-embedded:**<br>• internationalisation strategies are not the focus for sensemaking.<br>• role-related tasks and experiences are the focus of sensemaking, through which internationalisation strategies are implicitly and unintentionally made sense of.<br>• most of these tasks and experiences occur in the mundane, routine organisational reality around non-leaders, rather than in disruptive episodes. | **Role-embedded:**<br>• internationalisation strategies are not the focus for sensemaking.<br>• role-related tasks and experiences are the focus of sensemaking, through which internationalisation strategies are implicitly and unintentionally made sense of.<br>• most of these tasks and experiences occur in the mundane, routine organisational reality around non-leaders, rather than in disruptive episodes. | **Role-embedded:**<br>• internationalisation strategies are not the focus for sensemaking.<br>• role-related tasks and experiences are the focus of sensemaking, through which internationalisation strategies are implicitly and unintentionally made sense of.<br>• most of these tasks and experiences occur in the mundane, routine organisational reality around non-leaders, rather than in disruptive episodes. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sources of cues** | **Source-strat:**<br>• provides cues internationalisation strategies themselves<br>• commonly found in management spaces<br>• cues are extracted and transmitted cognitively and discursively.<br><br>**Source-tne (second-hand access):**<br>• provides cues about how internationalisation strategies are realised or manifest in tasks and experiences<br>• commonly found at the frontline<br>• cues are extracted experientially and cannot be transmitted as-is to another sensemaker. | **Source-strat (ad-hoc access):**<br>• provides cues internationalisation strategies themselves<br>• commonly found in management spaces<br>• cues are extracted and transmitted cognitively and discursively.<br><br>**Source-tne:**<br>• provides cues about how internationalisation strategies are realised or manifest in tasks and experiences<br>• commonly found at the frontline<br>• cues are extracted experientially and cannot be transmitted as-is to another sensemaker. | **Source-tne:**<br>• provides cues about how internationalisation strategies are realised or manifest in tasks and experiences<br>• commonly found at the frontline<br>• cues are extracted experientially and cannot be transmitted as-is to another sensemaker.<br><br>*Note: Access to source-strat only in special circumstances.* | **Source-tne:**<br>• provides cues about how internationalisation strategies are realised or manifest in tasks and experiences<br>• commonly found at the frontline<br>• cues are extracted experientially and cannot be transmitted as-is to another sensemaker.<br><br>*Note: Access to source-strat only in special circumstances.* |
| **Schemas** | • Have to consider what universities are and should be in order to devise strategic initiatives<br>• Possibly affected by institutions | • Beliefs about management shape implementation of strategies.<br>• Possibly affected by institutions | • Mostly utilitarian<br>• Efforts to reduce schema-task tension has great impact on enacted task outcomes.<br>• Possibly affected by institutions | • Mostly utilitarian<br>• Efforts to reduce schema-task tension has great impact on enacted task outcomes.<br>• Possibly affected by institutions |
| **Unique features** | Heavy engagement with the frontline to enact own ideas, gather feedback, gather source-tne, or find inspiration | Workplace politics as strong sensemaking constraints | Use of social media as an inclusive and scalable sensemaking venue | |
| **University leaders' role** | Empowering deans to become strategy drivers, thus enabling them to utilise their schemas and cue sources to devise initiatives | None found | Empowering students to become change agents, thus enabling them to enact change based on their interpretation of a strategy | |

More importantly, the theoretical findings around each issue have constituted part of the answer to my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* By weaving all these findings, the full answer to my research question can be stated as follows:

> Depending on the features of their formal roles, university non-leaders make sense of internationalisation strategies in either role-embedded or non-role embedded mode, drawing on their varying access to source-strat and source-tne and interpreting cues with the schemas that best serve their roles and that might contain meso and macro institutional influences. Schemas are particularly powerful in explaining the actions of strategy followers towards internationalisation strategies, which are most often framed within their self-interests.
>
> The sensemaking of each non-leader group is also characterised by unique features. Deans engage with the frontline to enact and gain feedback for their own ideas or to find inspirations. Lecturers' sensemaking is constrained by perceived power dynamics with colleagues, students and deans, which shape which meaning can be made and enacted. Students stand out for their pre-entry sensemaking and use of social media as an inclusive and scalable sensemaking and sensegiving venue.
>
> Last but not least, non-leaders may fully utilise their own schemas and cue sources to create strategic development or change if they are empowered by university leaders.

I wish to acknowledge that the answer does not capture all the nuances and complexities shown by the data. For example, it does not say which role features, reflected in archetypes and sub-types, correspond to which mode of sensemaking, nor does it mention the potential resonance between strategy followers' schemas and their tasks, which leads to organisational citizenship behaviours. Nonetheless, the answer highlights the key findings of this study in a brief and, I would argue, memorable manner, thus offering a balance between comprehensiveness and economy. All that being said, with the answer established it is now necessary to examine the relevance of non-leaders' sensemaking to the strategic management of internationalisation.

### 7.1.7. Non-leaders' sensemaking and the strategic management of internationalisation strategies

All the sensemaking issues discussed in this chapter bear relevance to the strategic management of university internationalisation strategies. This is because, as evidenced by *Blue* and *Red*, the outcomes of internationalisation strategies, and sometimes the strategies themselves, depend on the sensemaking of non-leaders, which involves different modes of sensemaking, cue access, schemas and group-specific features like frontline engagement,

workplace politics and social media. Based on the findings around the key issues of non-leaders' sensemaking (tabled in 7.1.6), four arguments can be made for the strategic management of internationalisation.

First, the strategic management of internationalisation is not only about formulating and implementing the *right* strategy, but also about tailoring the mundane, routine tasks of non-leaders' roles. The majority of non-leaders in this study are formally assigned with a strategy recipient role (7.1.1.3) and accordingly make sense of internationalisation strategies in a role-embedded manner (7.1.1.1). This means non-leaders' experiences with the routine tasks of their roles, especially concerning internationalisation, become cues that inform not only the accomplishment of those tasks but also the meaning of internationalisation strategies said tasks represent (7.1.2). As a consequence, whether internationalisation strategies are realised as intended will depend on whether non-leaders' tasks provide them with experiences that are conducive to the accomplishment of the tasks as specified by the institution. Moreover, non-leaders filter their experiences with an often self-interested schema (7.1.3.3) and subsequently make value judgement of tasks and, implicitly, the underlying strategies. This leads to the principal-agent problem (ibid.) if the tasks and strategies are perceived by non-leaders as irrelevant to their interests. For these reasons, in order for internationalisation strategies to be realised, the daily tasks of non-leaders should be shaped in a way that provides experiences conducive to the accomplishment of the tasks as specified, while being aligned with non-leaders interests as much as possible. How this can be done in practice, however, is beyond the goal of the present study. That said, my empirical data does provide a few signposts, to name a few:

- The tasks are accompanied by clear communication as to their purpose and execution (4.4.2).
- The tasks are underpinned by clear incentives and support mechanisms (4.3.3, 4.3.4).
- The tasks do not clash with the culture of the institution (4.3.3, 4.4.3) or its resources (5.2.2).

Second, the strategic management of internationalisation can be enhanced by leveraging non-leaders' sensemaking. As shown by the data, non-leaders in each role archetype and sub-type can utilise their sensemaking to overcome challenges in realising a strategy or even stimulate strategy development and adjustment:

- Strategy driver deans can combine their past experience and knowledge of the institution, gained from both source-strat and source-tne (7.1.2), in order to devise initiatives that push a strategy forward. This was exemplified by B_MM_EC, who drove *Blue*'s research strategy (4.3.1). Once an initiative is created, strategy driver deans may then engage with the frontline (7.1.4.1) and make sense of the tasks they themselves have set (as part of the initiative) for strategy followers.
- Somewhat similarly, strategy implementer deans can weave their own experience and personal resources with knowledge of the institution, gained largely from source-tne, in

order to implement a challenging top-down strategic initiative. A clear example was R_MM_CS, who had to achieve ABET accreditation for his faculty (5.4.1).

- In the case of strategy followers like lecturers and students, sensemaking may enable them to reconcile conflicting cues and reach a compromise or coping measure so that a task can be accomplished. An example of compromise was found with Blue lecturers and their workarounds for *Turnitin* (4.4.3), while one of coping was found with Red students, who sought and offered private tutoring in Vietnamese so as to cope with learning in English (5.2.2). It is worth noting that although compromises facilitate the execution of a strategy, they are likely to create unintended outcomes and in the long run may produce a common practice that replaces said strategy as the *de facto* strategy (see 2.2.1 for the concept of emergent strategy).
- Students' sensemaking, in particular, can inform strategists about the state of internationalisation strategies at the grassroots level, which can be used for strategy adjustment. This unique function of students' sensemaking exists thanks to the ubiquitous use of social media as a venue for collective sensemaking, which inadvertently makes social media a substantial source of cues about internationalisation strategies for not only strategists but anyone who can access it. An excellent example was *Red* students in joint programmes, who through social media effected a change in how the EMI strategy was implemented for them (5.2.3).

The data suggests that one way to leverage non-leaders' sensemaking is for strategists to empower them (7.1.5). Empowerment can range from giving non-leaders a voice, as *Red* VC did with students, to providing them with strategic decision-making power, as *Blue* VC did with her deans. In addition, strategists need to get involved with non-leaders and take concrete action to support them.

Third, non-leaders' sensemaking is the medium through which institutional forces and micro-politics affect the strategic management of internationalisation. This study has found that institutional forces at both the meso (organisational) and macro (field, societal) levels shape the schemas of university non-leaders and therefore the meaning of internationalisation strategies as well as its enactment (7.1.3.2). In this way, non-leaders' sensemaking, more specifically their schemas, become the medium through which the meso and macro contexts are imparted upon enacted strategies. Apart from institutions, micro-politics also shape enacted strategies through non-leaders' sensemaking. As discussed in 7.1.4.2, power dynamics between non-leaders may cause tension between what they want to do and, in the presence of significant others, what they have to do. Micro-politics, therefore, has the potential to prevent certain strategic outcomes by nudging non-leaders to enact certain meanings and forgo others.

Finally, the strategic management of internationalisation is not restricted to the physical confines of a university. On the one hand, prospective non-leaders (e.g. high school students) have already started making sense of a university's internationalisation strategies

prior to becoming organisational members (7.1.1.2, 7.1.1.3). Their pre-entry sensemaking generates expectations that prime behaviour towards tasks upon entry, thus having the potential to influence the outcomes of internationalisation strategies. On the other hand, non-leaders' sensemaking may take place in the digital world via social media. As discussed in 7.1.4.3, social media is a special venue for collective sensemaking due to its inclusivity and scalability; simply put, both university members and non-members can interact on social media, and there is little spatial or temporal constraints to their interaction. As a consequence, any discussions on social media might have far-reaching implications for the strategic management of internationalisation, one such implication being collective actions (e.g. Red joint students and langcen).

In brief, an examination of university non-leaders' sensemaking offers important insights into the strategic management of internationalisation. More specifically, my findings have shown that managing internationalisation strategies is mostly about shaping the mundane tasks that non-leaders engage in on a daily basis, in a way that orients non-leaders' sensemaking towards intended outcomes. In addition, non-leaders' sensemaking can be leveraged to enhance the effectiveness of internationalisation strategies; if non-leaders receive conflicting cues, however, their sensemaking might also lead to compromises that steer the strategies in unwanted directions. Non-leaders' sensemaking is also the medium through which institutions and micro-politics affect internationalisation strategies. Finally, a sensemaking lens reveals that, even beyond the physical confines of the university, prospective non-leaders and the digital world (particularly social media) might shape internationalisation strategies.

Now that I have established the answer to my research question and its relevance to the strategic management of university internationalisation, the rest of this chapter will outline how the present study has contributed to theory.

## 7.2. Contributions to theory

This section will examine how the framing of my research question and subsequent findings contribute to scholarship on higher education internationalisation, SAP and sensemaking, in which this study is firmly theoretically grounded. To start with, Section 7.2.1 will demonstrate that important insights into higher education internationalisation can be gained by studying it from a strategic management angle – specifically SAP, with sensemaking theory as the theoretical lens. The following Section 7.2.2 will show how this study helps advance the SAP movement in strategic management thanks to a combination of sensemaking theory and under-researched organisational members, especially frontliners (lecturers and students in this case). Finally in 7.2.3, an outline will be provided of the various contributions to sensemaking theory that have directly resulted from the discussion of the seven issues of

university non-leaders' sensemaking in 7.1. All of the contributions present clear implications for future research and practice, but these will be deferred to the concluding chapter.

### 7.2.1. The strategic management of higher education internationalisation

The present study helps fill an important gap in the literature: the strategic management of higher education internationalisation. As stated in Chapter 2, internationalisation has long been considered a strategic matter for higher education (Rudzki, 1995; Kehm & Teichler, 2007; Warwick, 2014) due to its economic, academic and sociocultural significance (Knight, 1997; de Wit, 2002). This strategic emphasis on internationalisation can also be seen in practice since internationalisation is often included as a component strategy or even part of the corporate vision and mission of many universities all over the world, including those in countries that are not higher education hubs like Vietnam (refer back to 2.1.2). Nonetheless, as stated in 2.1.3, my review of the literature on higher education internationalisation indicates that internationalisation as university strategies has been treated superficially, with the word 'strategy' being invoked to either as a recommendation that internationalisation should be planned and long-term (Knight, 2008a; de Wit, 2011) or as reference to empirical internationalisation strategies of particular higher education institutions (Taylor, 2004; Knight, 2008b; Ho, Lin, & Yang, 2015). Even studies that adopt a strategic management perspective engage little with the rich theoretical resources afforded by the vast field of strategic management (Elkin, Farnsworth, & Templer, 2008; Jiang & Carpenter, 2013) or use them as the central lens (Warwick, 2014). The few that examine internationalisation strategies with theoretical depth include two conceptual papers by Davies (1992) and Rudzki (1995; see also Al-Youssef, 2010), one study into the choice and implementation of internationalisation strategies by Adel, Zeinhom, and Mahrous (2018) in Egypt, and very recently one mixed-method study into impact factors for internationalisation strategies in Germany (Bremer, 2018). Despite their little relevance to my research question and in one case theoretical shortcomings (Adel, Zeinhom, & Mahrous, 2018) (again refer back to 2.1.3), these four studies are valuable explorations of higher education internationalisation from a strategic management perspective. In the end, however, the small number of such works and their relative similarity in focus (on strategies themselves and strategic factors) means that there is a lot of ground to be gained in understanding internationalisation strategies.

My study makes, therefore, a timely addition to the higher education internationalisation literature. Not only does it approach internationalisation from a strategic management angle, it employs a novel and coherent theoretical framework based on SAP and sensemaking theory and moreover applies the framework to study university actors who are not traditionally associated with strategy work, namely deans, lecturers and students. All of this is reflected in the research question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* This way of framing the research problem and the subsequent findings have generated important insights into higher education internationalisation. That is, internationalisation is not simply a matter of planning the right strategies or capturing

opportunities into strategies, as proposed by Rudzki (1995) and Poole (2001), but it is also shaped by the way non-leaders make sense of those strategies. Most of the time, non-leaders' internationalisation-strategy sensemaking is characterised by its role-embeddedness; that is, it is unintentional, implicit and embedded within the sensemaking of the daily, mundane tasks of their assigned formal roles. As a result, whether and to what extent a university can achieve the economic, academic or sociocultural goals of its internationalisation (Knight, 1997; de Wit, 2002) will depend on the experiences non-leaders encounter in their daily organisational life when fulfilling their roles. In addition, such role-embedded sensemaking is affected by a myriad of factors, which in this study include role features, sources of information, cognitive frames, meso and macro institutions, frontline engagement, politics, social media and empowerment. An examination of these factors offers even further insights into higher education internationalisation (specifically with regards to how it can be strategically managed), which have been detailed in 7.1.7. All of my findings about university non-leaders' sensemaking and its relevance to the strategic management of internationalisation mark my contribution to higher education internationalisation research and at the same time demonstrate the value of a strategic management perspective, particularly SAP, combined with sensemaking theory in studying the topic.

### 7.2.2. Sensemaking theory and frontliners in SAP

Another contribution of the present study is advancing the SAP movement in strategic management, with regards to the use of sensemaking theory and coverage of frontliners. On the one hand, a key character of SAP research is its 'theoretical pluralism' (Golsorkhi et al. 2015b, p. 12) whereby it draws upon a lot of theories, both in sociology (Orlikowski, 2000; Gomez & Bouty, 2011) and management and organisation studies (Ambrosini, Bowman, & Burton-Taylor, 2007; Salvato, 2009) to elucidate the praxis, practitioners and practices of strategising (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Among the many theoretical lens found and/or advocated for in SAP (see Golsorkhi et al. 2015a), Weick's (1995) sensemaking has received a lot of attention due to its suitability and usefulness in studying matters of interest to SAP researchers, such as strategic cognition (Kaplan, 2008) or the reception of strategic change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). However, from their extensive review, Cornelissen and Schildt (2015) find that sensemaking in SAP has mostly been used in a 'perfunctory manner' (p. 345) in that, instead of a theoretical lens, it is a 'shorthand or label' (p. 350) for empirical instances of thinking and talking (e.g. Rouleau, 2005; Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013; Kwon, Clarke, & Wodak, 2014), which are then explained using other theories. As a consequence, the diverse concepts and models in the sensemaking literature remain under-utilised in SAP. Moving beyond this, as Cornelissen and Schildt (2015) strongly suggest, would lead to better theoretical claims and explanations of the subject matter. My study precisely responds to this call with the adoption of sensemaking as the theoretical framework to address the research question, which is also framed around sensemaking. In Chapter 2, I have specified and defined the key sensemaking concepts that guided my data collection and analysis; more importantly, I have also stated my orientation towards the cognitive aspect of sensemaking

and addressed how the social aspect was factored in. Clarity in one's appropriation of sensemaking theory has been emphasised in both the SAP (Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015) and sensemaking literature (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). That said, sensemaking theory has indeed enabled me to investigate how strategy is done, specifically how internationalisation strategies are interpreted and acted on by university non-leaders. For instance, Section 7.1.3.3 discussed how unintended outcomes might result from the incongruence between lecturers and students' schemas and the internationalisation-related tasks they have to carry out.

On the other hand, due to its focus on the doing of strategy, SAP has explored and given voice to those who do not conventionally decide strategies but are instrumental in their implementation, like middle managers (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), frontliners (Balogun, Best, & Le, 2015) or consultants (Nordqvist & Melin, 2008). However, it appears that middle managers have received overwhelmingly more coverage than the others, particularly frontliners. In my survey of the literature, there is only one study into frontliners (Balogun, Best, & Le, 2015), compared to an easily found set of four about middle managers (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Sillince & Mueller, 2007; Mantere, 2008). Some studies do cover both but without dedicated treatment of either (Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Faure et al., 2010; Erkama & Vaara, 2010), because their focus is not on the two groups but rather on issues that happen to involve both, such as communication (Faure et al., 2010) or participation in strategy making (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). As a side note, top managers or those with strategic decision-making power are also more prominent than frontliners in the SAP literature (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2002; Mueller et al., 2013; Liu & Maitlis, 2014). Thus, frontliners constitute a gap in SAP. For this reason, the present study is of value to SAP for its exploration of university lecturers and students, who are essentially frontliners. It has clearly demonstrated the impact of their utilitarian schemas as well as unique sensemaking praxis and practices on strategies; for instance, lecturers might reject or withdraw from a strategic initiative that brings them little perceived benefits and clashes with their view of the university (*Blue* lecturers and the three research initiatives). Students, by comparison, can leverage social media and empowerment to create strategic change (*Red* students and *langcen* courses).

In fact, my investigation into lecturers and students has inadvertently revealed three issues of frontline strategising that possibly prove important to SAP: institutional influences, politics and social media. First, this study has found that institutions, at both the meso (organisational) and macro (field, societal) levels, affect the attitudes of all frontliners, leading them towards acceptance, usually uncritical, or rejection of strategies (refer back to 7.1.3.2). For example, *Red* lecturers in *Computer Science* found EMI a must because they perceived English as the core feature of the field. The role of institutions in strategising is still a 'nascent' (Smets, Greenwood, & Lounsbury, 2015, p. 283) topic in SAP research, and it appears the intersection of institutions and SAP has primarily been conceptual (Suddaby, Seidl, & Le, 2013; Smets, Greenwood, & Lounsbury, 2015). Nonetheless, SAP scholars (ibid.)

have pointed out the compatibility and complementarity between institutional research and SAP, in that their combination can shed lights on the interaction and mutual influence between structures, especially at the macro level, and strategising actions at the micro level. My findings, therefore, substantiate this argument and additionally show that meso-level institutions do play a role in micro-level praxis.

Second, workplace micro-politics emerge from lecturer data as a constraint on the courses of action that frontliners can take with a given strategy. This was candidly evident when a *Blue* lecturer in *Economics and Commerce* (B_L3_EC) spoke about her and a few others' reluctant attendance at *Blue Research Seminars* out of their respect for the dean, or about her anxiety of retaliation from other lecturers if she had failed their students for crossing the 20% *Turnitin* threshold. Unlike institutions, politics and power have been addressed more widely in both conceptual (Fenton & Langley, 2011; Clegg & Kornberger, 2015) and empirical SAP works (Kaplan, 2008; Mueller et al., 2013; Hardy & Thomas, 2014). However, it seems most extant research is centred on the impact of politics and power, very often in the form of competing discourses, on strategy making (Kaplan, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Brorstrom, 2017), or on the diffusion, legitimisation and resistance of newly made strategies (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Erkama & Vaara, 2010). While my findings also deal with politics and power, they revolve around (a) the *perception* of power (refer back to 7.1.4.2) rather than competing discourses and (b) the mundane, routine actions that create outcomes for strategies rather than strategy making or diffusion. In this way, my study contributes to the discussions about politics and power in SAP by exploring a new form of political influence (perceived power) and a new area of praxis shaped by politics (mundane, routine activity).

Lastly, the findings from students highlight social media as a powerful practice, or tool for strategising. As discussed in 7.1.4.3, the inclusiveness and scalability of social media enable frontliners like students to share information with a large audience that comprises not only other frontliners but also decision makers and even external stakeholders. This information can then be used by decision makers as feedback or by frontliners themselves to take collective action, as *Red* VC and students did respectively; there is of course a caveat in that the former have to be present on social media. The impact of social media on strategy work and social media itself as a strategy have been noticed in recent years, notably by researchers in communication (Benthaus, Risius, & Beck, 2016), information systems (Senadheera, Warren, & Leitch, 2017) and organisational knowledge (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018; Neeley & Leonardi, 2018). However, social media is still an obscure topic in SAP research with only brief mentions in Whittington's (2014) conceptual paper and one empirical study by Neeley and Leonardi (2018), who find that non-work related interaction on social media initially enhances work-related knowledge sharing but then hinders it. As a consequence, apart from the insights by Neeley and Leonardi (2018) it is unknown how social media, presumably as a practice, can play a role in strategising praxis, or how social

media itself is used as a practice in strategising. My findings about students' use of social media are therefore a chance yet timely contribution to the SAP literature.

To sum up, it is clear that the use of sensemaking theory and explicit focus on frontliners can help to advance the SAP movement. Here the combination of both has produced considerable insights into the doing and accomplishment or non-accomplishment of strategies. A close look at frontliners, in particular, further reveals valuable issues like institutions, politics and social media. All of this constitutes my contribution to the SAP literature.

### 7.2.3. The ontology, core concepts and new directions of sensemaking theory

The final area of contribution of this study is to sensemaking theory. It can be seen throughout Section 7.1 that the seven sensemaking issues emerging from the data are under-researched if not contrary to extant sensemaking ideas. For example, there is little sensemaking research into institutions (7.1.3.2), and existing theorisation posits sensemaking as an explicit and episodic process rather than an implicit and mundane one (7.1.1.1). It has therefore been a great challenge for me to discuss my findings in relation to the sensemaking literature. More importantly, this means that the very findings presented in 7.1 together form my contribution to sensemaking theory, and some of them can even be considered grounds for debate (e.g. implicit sensemaking). Hereunder I will provide a brief outline and summary of these findings and associated contributions to sensemaking theory:

- First, my findings are a departure from the current view of the sensemaking process, which posits that it is triggered by and explicitly conducted during episodes of great uncertainty and disruptions (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). The data shows that sensemaking can also occur continually and implicitly in the mundane, routine organisational reality around the sensemaker, not to mention the knowledge gained from the mundane can inform sensemaking of crisis-like episodes (7.1.1.1).
- Second, my study sheds lights on the sensemaking differences of different organisational groups, specifically middle managers versus frontliners, in this case being university deans versus lecturers and students, respectively. Although middle managers and frontliners' sensemaking have both been addressed in prior research (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Prior, Keranen, & Koskela, 2018), they were isolated from one another. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to comparatively synthesise these studies and tease out intergroup differences due to variations in the use of sensemaking theory, research contexts and the sensemaking subject. My study, by contrast, simultaneously covers middle managers (deans) and frontliners (lecturers and students) and focuses on one sensemaking subject (internationalisation strategies) in one context (Vietnamese universities). This approach has enabled the mapping of differences in their role features (7.1.1.3) with two modes of sensemaking (7.1.1.3), varying access to two distinct cue

sources (7.1.2.2) and certain schemas (7.1.3.1). On top of this, the uniqueness of university deans, lecturers and students' sensemaking has also been revealed (7.1.4).

- Third, by borrowing from agency theory, cognitive dissonance and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), my study has explored the often self-interested nature of frontliners' schemas and its impact on their actions (7.1.3.3). Previous investigations into schemas have been rather confined to the context of strategic change, where top management attempt to shape other stakeholders' framing of a change (Bean & Hamilton, 2006; Sonenshein, 2010; Ma & Seidl, 2017) and where change recipients like middle managers and employees try to adjust their schemas (Bean & Hamilton, 2006; Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Alternatively, the role of schemas in managerial decision-making has also received attention (Sleegers et al., 2009; Winch & Maytorena, 2009; Hahn et al., 2014). As a consequence, little is known about frontliners' schemas when making sense of mundane, routine tasks, which is a gap that the present study fills.
- Fourth, my findings about the presence of institutional forces (7.1.3.2) and politics (7.1.4.2) in university non-leaders' sensemaking help address the critique of sense making theory as 'subjectivistic' (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. 20) or 'hyper-agentic' (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 98).
- Fifth, the findings about deans' frontline engagement as a form of middle managers' enactment (7.1.4.1) add to the scarce research on middle managers' enactment, which has only dealt with communication and sensegiving.
- Sixth, this study explores social media as an inclusive and scalable sensemaking tool that might lead to strategic change (7.1.4.3). Social media as a whole is a very recent topic in sensemaking research, with a few studies into its role during an organisational crisis (Gruber et al., 2015), revolution (Oh et al., 2015) or extreme event like terrorist attack or plane crash (Steiglitz et al., 2018).
- The seventh and final contribution of this study to sensemaking theory is the role of empowerment (by corporate leaders) in non-leaders' sensemaking. The data shows that when empowered, non-leaders can take advantage of their schemas and cue sources to drive or change internationalisation strategies (7.1.5). Despite its popularity in the broader management literature, empowerment seems largely absent in sensemaking works.

## 7.3. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has applied sensemaking theory to discussing the key themes from the case studies, thus generating theoretical findings that help answer the research question *How are university internationalisatoin strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* More specifically, the discussion has revealed seven key issues:

- The first three issues are present across all university non-leader groups (deans, lecturers, students) but manifest differently in each, depending on their role features. They are modes of sensemaking (role-embedded and non-role embedded), access to cue sources (source-strat and source-tne), and schema content.

- The next three issues are unique to each non-leader group: frontline engagement for deans, politics for lecturers and social media for students.
- The last issue relates to non-leaders' empowerment by university leaders, which enable the former to directly shape internationalisation strategies via their sensemaking.

The findings around the seven sensemaking issues above constitute the answer to my research question, which was stated in 7.1.6, and bear relevance to the strategic management of university internationalisation, which were outlined in 7.1.7. With the findings, my study has made contributions to three separate literatures: higher education internationalisation, SAP and sensemaking. First, the study addresses the paucity and theoretical shortcomings of extant higher education internationalisation research that takes a strategic management perspective. Second, the study helps further the SAP movement in strategic management by extensively adopting sensemaking as a theoretical lens and exploring the strategising of frontliners, specifically university lecturers and students. Lastly, my findings expand sensemaking in various ways, which were listed in 7.2.3, and contribute to the debate on its explicit and episodic nature.

# CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This study has applied the Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) approach and sensemaking theory to studying how university internationalisation strategies are interpreted and realised by university non-leaders. In so doing, it has contributed to knowledge on the strategic management of higher education internationalisation, as well as helped further the SAP movement in strategic management research and contributed to sensemaking theory.

In this concluding chapter, I will summarise the key points of the thesis (8.1), outline the practical implications for managing university internationalisation strategies (8.2), and finally discuss the limitations of my study (8.3) and venues for future research into higher education internationalisation as strategies (8.4).

## 8.1. Research summary

This study has been conducted to solve one question *How are university internationalisation strategies made sense of by non-leaders?* The study has emerged out of my interests in the managerial dimension of internationalisation, specifically the reception and realisation of internationalisation strategies by non-leaders like deans, lecturers and students. More importantly, it is a response to the lack of research into higher education internationalisation from a strategic management perspective, which is a gap that exists even though internationalisation has long been considered a strategic issue for many universities due to its economic, sociocultural and academic benefits. The motivation and rationale behind this study was explained in detail in Chapter 1 and 2.

To address the research question, my study has engaged substantially with the theoretical resources afforded by the strategic management and organisation studies literatures. In particular, the SAP approach in strategy research and sensemaking theory have been incorporated into my theoretical framework. As SAP research, this study follows the tripartite framework of *praxis*, *practitioners* and *practices* (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009), with emphasis on the sensemaking praxis (or flow of sensemaking activity) of deans, lecturers and students. Furthermore, this sensemaking praxis is placed within the structural influences at the meso (organisational) and macro (field, societal) levels. The praxis has then been examined from a cognitive perspective of sensemaking theory rather than a social one; that is, my study investigates how university non-leaders' sensemaking is accomplished via the application of *schemas* or cognitive frames to selecting and interpreting cues from their surroundings, instead of via the discursive practices that one party uses to influence another's meaning-making. An indepth discussion of the SAP approach and sensemaking theory, as well as the concept of strategy, can be found in Chapter 2.

Methodologically, the study has adopted a qualitative, comparative case study design. The design choice is pragmatic in the sense that it is entirely driven by the demands for depth of the research question and theoretical framework, and not by any ontological and epistemological commitments (which I do not hold). With that said, the design involves two Vietnamese universities, coded *Blue* and *Red*, that had explicit internationalisation strategies and were active in internationalising. The Vietnamese context has been chosen for its relevance, having a long history of internationalisation, relative novelty in the higher education internationalisation literature and practicality to myself as a researcher since I am a Vietnamese and have a personal network who could have helped with case selection and access. From the two cases, data has been collected utilising multiple methods, including semi-structured individual interview and focus group, document analysis, quasi-ethnographic campus visit and, added upon suggestions by the participants, social media analysis. In each university, the participants recruited for interview consisted of a top manager, an officer in internationalisation (none found for *Blue*), and deans, lecturers and students from two faculties. All data was then analysed through four stages: holistic exploration, single-case thick description, cross-case comparison, and finally theorisation. Despite careful planning, complications with access to *Blue* and *Red* caused significant changes and delays to participant recruitment and data collection. Chapter 3 described and explained the rationale for my methodological choices; it also recaptured the complications I encountered with *Blue* and *Red* and the subsequent impact on participant recruitment and data collection at the two universities.

The case studies of *Blue* and *Red* have provided rich empirical evidence of internationalisation-strategy sensemaking by deans, lecturers and students. In so doing, they demonstrate that the strategic management of internationalisation depends as much on non-leaders' sensemaking as on having the *right* strategy. It is impossible, however, to summarise the cases here due to space constraints, so I will only highlight what is most notable about each. On the one hand, *Blue* has shown that deans' sensemaking may result in innovative initiatives that can push internationalisation strategies forward, if they are empowered to become strategic drivers. However, such initiatives can be received unfavourably and thus resisted by lecturers and students because they violate the latter's personal utility, which is tied to the status quo. *Red*, by comparison, has demonstrated the potential of social media as a device for student-led strategic change because it enables students to engage in collective sensemaking, which might then lead to bottom-up sensegiving towards top management. The necessary condition, however, is that top management have to utilise social media as a source of information and make their presence known on social media. The case studies of *Blue* and *Red*, including the institutional profiles of both universities, were respectively presented in Chapter 4 and 5.

The case studies of *Blue* and *Red* have then been compared to tease out the sensemaking patterns of each non-leader group, which provided the direct basis for discussion. The ensuing discussion has examined the key sensemaking issues emerging from the

comparative analysis; some of the issues are applicable to all non-leader groups (intergroup issues), while others are unique to one (intragroup issues). The intergroup issues include university non-leaders' modes of sensemaking, access to cue sources and the content of their schemas, all of which are tied to the features of their formal organisational roles. The intragroup issues are deans' frontline engagement, the impact of micro-politics on lecturers' sensemaking and students' pre-entry sensemaking and use of social media. In addition to these six issues, the empowerment of non-leaders' sensemaking by institutional leaders has been examined. Chapter 6 presented cross-case themes and patterns in the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of deans, lecturers and students from *Blue* and *Red*. The findings in Chapter 6 then provided the basis for discussion in Chapter 7, resulting in the theoretical findings above.

The findings in Chapter 7 have constituted the answer to my research question *How are university internationalisation strategies are made sense of by non-leaders?*

> Depending on role features, university non-leaders make sense of internationalisation strategies in either role-embedded or non-role embedded mode, drawing on their varying access to source-strat and source-tne and interpreting cues with the schemas that best serve their roles and that might contain meso and macro institutional influences. Schemas are particularly powerful in explaining the actions of strategy followers towards internationalisation strategies, which are most often framed within their self-interests.
>
> The sensemaking of each non-leader group is also characterised by unique features. Deans engage with the frontline to enact and gain feedback for their own ideas or to find inspirations. Lecturers' sensemaking is constrained by perceived power dynamics with colleagues, students and deans, which shape which meaning can be made and enacted. Students stand out for their use of social media as an inclusive and scalable sensemaking and sensegiving venue.
>
> Last but not least, non-leaders may fully utilise their own schemas and cue sources to create strategic development or change if they are empowered by university leaders.

More importantly, the findings bear strong relevance to the strategic management of internationalisation. They have shown the importance of shaping non-leaders' routine tasks in a way that orients their sensemaking towards intended strategic outcomes, and of leveraging their sensemaking to enhance the effectiveness of internationalisation strategies. They have also revealed that non-leaders' sensemaking can be a medium through which institutional forces and micro-politics affect internationalisation strategies. Lastly, my findings draw attention to the potential impact of sensemaking that takes place beyond the physical confines of a university. The answer to my research question, a summary of theoretical findings and the relevance of my findings to the strategic management of internationalisation are also found in Chapter 7.

With my research question answered, my contributions to theory finally emerged, specifically to three literatures: higher education internationalisation, SAP and sensemaking. First, this study has explored the strategic management of higher education internationalisation, which is a gap in extant higher education internationalisation research. In so doing, important insights were gained into the strategic management of university internationalisation. Second, this study has helped further the SAP movement in strategic management by demonstrating how sensemaking theory can be extensively adopted as a theoretical lens to investigate strategising, rather than as a mere label for empirical instances of thinking (2.2.3.6, 2.2.3.7). Moreover, my study has explored the strategising of frontliners (specifically lecturers and students), who are under-researched in SAP. Third and lastly, my theoretical findings have shed more lights on core concepts in sensemaking theory and contributed to existing debates on the locus and nature of the sensemaking process. A detailed outline of my contributions to theory can be found in the second half of Chapter 7.

## 8.2. Practical implications

Although academic in nature, the present study does pose practical implications for university leaders, especially top managers, and deans in managing internationalisation strategies. The implications are both drawn from the theoretical findings (Chapter 7) and directly indicated by empirical evidence (Chapter 4 and 5). Overall, all implications underline the necessity of paying attention to non-leaders' meaning and creating the conditions where their sensemaking can contribute to strategic management. With that said, the practical implications are as follows:

- Deans can be empowered to become strategic drivers (7.1.1.2, 7.1.5), in which case the university can take full advantage of their previous experiences (e.g. B_MM_EC was a professor in a multi-nationally funded HEI in Thailand), personal connections (e.g. one of R_MM_CS' friends was a dean in a major public university) and managerial skills (e.g. B_MM_LC's attention to details) in order to develop internationalisation strategies. This may require, however, top management to carefully vet prospective deans to ensure that their beliefs about higher education (e.g. B_MM_LC's insistence on student-led initiatives) are aligned with the university's corporate strategy and internationalisation strategies. Moreover, prospective deans can be given a trial period, as B_MM_EC was (4.3.1), so that they can make sense of available resources and capabilities and socialise with staff, which helps them make informed strategic decisions.
- Dean empowerment does not solely mean giving them decision-making power. Top managers might also need to actively support them. For example, B_TM attended a meeting between B_MM_EC and *Human Resources* and gave her vocal support for the former's research-lecturer contractual scheme (4.3.1). Apart from active support, top managers can arrange working space in a way that fosters communication of ideas. The lack of office space at *Blue* was a blessing in disguise because, while having to share the same room, deans had the chance to discuss what they did in their faculties. This enabled B_MM_EC to disseminate his initiatives to other faculties (4.3.2).

- Deans or more generally progenitors of strategies and strategic initiatives would be well-advised to engage with the frontline (7.1.4.1). All the deans involved in this study, especially R_MM_CS, showed that frontline engagement brought four clear benefits: It enabled them to enact their ideas, provided feedback on said ideas and management style, provided information of the frontline and finally inspired new ideas.
- Lecturers and students can also be empowered to have strategic impact, at the very least by having their voices heard (7.1.5). A distinct characteristic of lecturers and students' sensemaking is that it relies almost completely on their daily, mundane experiences on the frontline, which provide them with immediate, tangible cues on the effectiveness (or lack of) of internationalisation strategies (7.1.1). Moreover, these cues often elude those higher in the decision-making hierarchy (7.1.2), who are unlikely to engage in the daily tasks where strategies are realised. Therefore, it can be beneficial for decision-makers to listen to lecturers and students (or other frontliners for that matter) in order to gather cues they lack access to. The *langcen* problem at *Red* was solved precisely because the Vice-Chancellor listened to joint students' complaints and acted upon it (5.2.3).
- However, lecturers and students' voices can only be heard if there is an effective communication channel in place. The data offers two such channels: One is social media (7.1.4.3). The advantage of social media is its inclusivity, connecting different people from various organisational positions and even outside the university, as well as scalability, facilitating a large number of people to communicate at the same time. The other channel is physical social gathering. This was undertaken by B_MM_LC, who invited students to have lunch with him every week and asked them about recent happenings (4.4.1). Nonetheless, the data also implies that decision-makers need to take actions upon the cues gathered, because otherwise frontliners are not motivated to share information. This was what happened with student feedback at *Red* (5.2.3), which students did not believe was taken seriously as they saw little effect resulting from it.
- Apart from empowerment, the daily, mundane tasks of lecturers and students (and of deans for that matter) should be shaped in a way that orients them towards intended strategic outcomes (7.1.7). This is because lecturers and students interpret and realise internationalisation strategies through the very tasks they encounter on a daily basis as part of their assigned roles.
- Strategic initiatives should be accompanied by incentivising and deterrent mechanisms, as well as effective communication. The purpose is to align the university's interests with those of frontliners, which are often utilitarian (7.1.3.3). This is especially true if the initiatives disrupt the status quo (e.g. B_MM_EC's research initiatives disrupted *Blue's* teaching culture) or make demands that are beyond frontliners' capacity (e.g. *Blue* students were unfamiliar with academic writing and plagiarism). B_L1_EC used the metaphors of 'carrot' and 'stick' (4.3.3) to explain the limited success of research at *Blue*, and all the *Blue* students recalled that the training workshops on *Turnitin* were very technical with little explanation of plagiarism or academic writing (4.4.2, 4.4.3).
- Attention should be paid to sensemaking constraints such as institutional and (perceived) political forces because they can either facilitate or hinder the implementation of strategies (7.1.3.2). For example, all *Computer Science* lecturers and students at *Red* welcomed English as the medium of instruction because English was the language of

their discipline (5.2.1). On the other hand, power perception was part of the reason B_L3_EC avoided penalising *Blue* students for plagiarising, consequently compromising the *Turnitin* initiative.

- Care should be taken when communicating about internationalisation strategies to prospective university members (e.g. high school students who might apply). The data has shown that one's sensemaking about a university's internationalisation strategies can start even before his/her entry. This pre-entry sensemaking primes post-entry behaviours and therefore has the potential to affect the outcomes of the strategies (7.1.7). For example, prior to enrolment at *Red*, R_S2_BS had had the impression (of *Red*'s advertisement) that English was used both in and outside lectures, and this motivated her to speak English with her friends all the time on campus (5.2.1, 6.3.4). Although she was an isolated case, it can be speculated that if many students had acted similarly[42] they could have created a positively unintended outcome for *Red*'s EMI strategy.
- Last but not least, attention should be paid to monitoring social media. Due to its inclusivity and scalability, social media greatly facilitates collective sensemaking, which makes social media a vast source of information and a springboard for collective actions (7.1.4.3). A prime example is the langcen debacle at *Red* (5.2.3), where social media use by students effected change to how the EMI strategy was implemented for joint students.

## 8.3. Limitations

The present study exhibits many limitations in the framing of its research question, theoretical framework and methodological choices. These limitations originate from either the compromises I had to make for feasibility reasons or the conscious decisions to take the study in a certain direction and not another. Hereunder an outline of the limitations is provided:

- The research question only covers three groups of non-leaders, namely deans, lecturers and students. Based on my use of the term 'university non-leaders' (see 1.3), at least three other groups are missing: administrative staff (e.g. faculty secretaries, recruitment officers), support staff (e.g. cashiers, caterers), functional managers (e.g. head of marketing).
- My application of the SAP approach focuses on the sensemaking praxis of non-leaders rather than non-leaders themselves as practitioners or their practices. Therefore, findings about the characteristics of my participants (e.g. role features, academic background) and about their sensemaking tools, procedures and routines (e.g. social media) have only played a supporting role to elaborate on findings about their sensemaking praxis.
- This study adopts sensemaking theory from a cognitive rather than social perspective. Therefore, it remains to be seen how *intersubjective meaning* (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) of internationalisation strategies is made within and between groups of non-leaders, or what discursive practices are used by which group.

[42] This was a possibility considering R_S1_BS and R_S1_IE had the same impression of Red's advertisement as R_S2_BS, in that they thought English was used for all activities.

- The methodological design is small scale and involves only two Vietnamese universities in the city of Saigon, which also means that my study is limited to *internationalisation at home* (Knight, 2004). Moreover, I focus only on faculties that are active in internationalisation. Consequently, little is know about the internationalisation-strategy sensemaking of non-leaders in other universities in Vietnam and beyond, or in passive faculties.
- The sensemaking of my participants was captured with interview, making the data retrospective in nature. Thus, it is not known how internationalisation-strategy sensemaking unfolds in realtime.

## 8.4. Recommendations

Based on the limitations above, four recommendations can be made for future research on university non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies. The recommendations are distinct but not mutually exclusive, so researchers could choose to explore one or several at the same time.

- The breadth of evidence should be increased. This involves investigating universities that are outside Saigon or Vietnam, or universities that engage in *internationalisation abroad* (Knight, 2004) like those with branch campuses. Moreover, non-leaders from faculties that are passive in internationalisation can be included, not least because their sensemaking could be the cause of such passiveness.
- The theoretical framework can also be expanded. Future research can choose to focus on non-leaders' traits and/or the tools, procedures and routines they use to make sense of internationalisation strategies; these foci correspond to the elements of practitioner and practices in Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) tripartite framework. Moreover, a social perspective of sensemaking theory can be adopted instead of the cognitive one.
- In terms of methodology, methods that capture sensemaking in realtime can be deployed. Some examples are observation, whether non-participant or participant, shadowing or even participatory data collection, where participants can record their own sensemaking. Indeed, the use of such methods has been called for in extant sensemaking literature (Maitlis & Christianson, 2004, p. 106).
- Finally, other groups of non-leaders like administrative and support staff, or functional managers should be explored. I would suggest that these non-leaders can be further divided into two groups to facilitate focus: One comprises those directly responsible for internationalisation, such as recruitment officers, immigration counsellors, human resources officers. The other includes those who play a more indirect role in internationalisation, such as faculty secretaries, information system managers, marketing and design officers.

## 8.5. Final remarks: A research agenda

This study has been a long and rewarding journey for myself as a researcher. Thanks to the study, not only have I explored a matter of personal interest and academic significance – the (strategic) management of university internationalisation, but I have actually had a few opportunities to apply what had been learned to higher education in my home country of Vietnam. For instance, after her dismissal, the VC of *Blue* set up a consultancy agency for schools and universities, and she invited me to work on some of her projects. One notable project was to assist a newly-established private university in middle Vietnam in planning their first strategic period.

Nonetheless, there remains much scope for investigation with regards to how universities plan and execute internationalisation. At the very least, the recommendations outlined in the last section can be addressed so that a more comprehensive and robust understanding of non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies can be gained. Alternatively, a move beyond non-leaders and sensemaking theory might also prove valuable for both theory and practice. For example, a combination of top management and the *resource-based view* (Regner, 2015) may result in questions around the decision-making processes of top management when allocating resources for different international activities (e.g. student recruitment versus research partnerships). In this way, although this study has come to an end, it has opened a wide research agenda for me.

## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

Dear participant,

I would like to ask for your consent to participate in the research project 'Grounding Internationalisation: The role of university non-leaders in an internationalisation strategy'. The study is conducted as part of my PhD programme at the University of Bath, UK.

Your identity and responses will be kept confidential and will not be used for any purpose except that of my own research. More importantly, you have the right to 1. voice your concerns about my data collection should you feel uncomfortable, 2. refuse to respond to questions or tasks you think are intrusive, 3. withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, in which case I will no longer retain the data and return everything to you. Details of your acquaintances and institution may be incorporated into the study but all identifying traces will be removed; however, you can negotiate with me which details to be included or not.

Data collection will be conducted via interview. I have enclosed the information sheet of the interview procedure in this letter. Please note that you can ask me for clarification, but I cannot give a full explanation to avoid data contamination. Towards the end of this study, you will receive the data and my analysis for revision of any misrepresentation of yourself, your acquaintances or institution.

Please also note that this study may be published but any information that identifies you, your acquaintances or institution will not be used unless stated otherwise by you.

I would be very grateful if you could participate in my research.

Should you have any enquiry about the study, please feel free to contact me in person, via my phone number, email blt25@bath.ac.uk, or Facebook.

Please tick as appropriate

☐ I would like to participate in this research project

☐ I would not like to participate in this research project

Please write your full name and sign

| Participant's name: | Researcher's name: |
| --- | --- |
| _____ | _____ |
| Participant's signature: | Researcher's signature: |
| _____ | _____ |
| Date: | |

# APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

## ENTRY INTERVIEW

| Focus | Data | Questions | Possible probes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Internationalisation strategies as enacted | Data A | 1. What does your university do to internationalise? Could you describe what is international about the university? | You have often mentioned this international aspect/activity. Could you elaborate on it? Why is it important to the university? |
| Elaboration of formally stated internationalisation strategies* | Data A | 2. I saw this interesting internationalisation strategy mentioned in your corporate strategy. Could you elaborate on it? | Why did you choose this strategy?<br>You have not mentioned this strategy earlier. Why? |
| Non-leaders' sensemaking of internationalisation strategies | Data C | 3. From what you said, it seems this strategy is very important. Could you tell me how it is implemented?<br>4. What are the challenges in implementation?<br>5. What is the role of deans, lecturers and students in implementing this strategy?<br>6. From your observation, how is the strategy received among deans, lecturers and students? | Why is it a challenge?<br>What happens if deans/lecturers/students do not complete this task?<br>In your opinion, why do deans/lecturers/students feel that way about this strategy? |
| Faculty identification for Data collection Stage 2 | | 7. Which faculties would you recommend I investigate? | What should I keep in mind when approaching the faculty?<br>What is the faculty known for in terms of internationalisation? |

* as gathered from prior document analysis of the corporate strategy

## DEAN INTERVIEW

| Focus | Data | Questions | Possible probes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Academic and managerial background | Data D | 1. What is your role as dean?<br>2. Please describe your management style.<br>3. Could you tell me a bit about your academic and managerial background? | What made you come to this university?<br>Can you talk a bit more about this responsibility?<br>How does your previous academic and/or managerial experience shape your deanship now? |
| Sensemaking of internationalisation strategies (free answer) | Data C | 4. Could you describe the international aspects and activities in your faculty?<br>5. What do you think about them?<br>6. How do you manage them?<br>7. In your opinion, what is an international university? | Why do you think so about this international aspect/activity? |
| Sensemaking of internationalisation strategies (stimulated answer**) | Data C | 8. Are you aware of the university's internationalisation or corporate strategy? (show the corporate strategy document) I am going to list the internationalisation strategies as formally stated, and would like to have your comment on each. Do you have it in the faculty and what do you think about it? | Why do you think so about this strategy?<br>How is this strategy implemented in the faculty?<br>How do you manage the implementation? |

** using data gathered from document analysis of the corporate strategy and the entry interview

## LECTURER INTERVIEW

| Focus | Data | Questions | Possible probes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Academic background | Data D | 1. Please describe your responsibilities as a lecturer here.<br>2. Could you tell me a bit about your academic background? | What made you come to this university? |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sensemaking of internationalisation strategies (free answer) | Data C | 3. Could you describe the international aspects and activities in your faculty?<br>4. Which international activities have you taken part in? What do you think about them?<br>5. In your opinion, what is an international university? | Why do you think so about this international aspect/activity? |
| Sensemaking of internationalisation strategies (stimulated answer**) | Data C | 6. Are you aware of the university's internationalisation or corporate strategy? (show the corporate strategy document) I am going to list the internationalisation strategies as formally stated, and would like to have your comment on each. Have you engaged in any activities related to them? What do you think about those activities? | Why do you think so about this strategy? |

** using data gathered from document analysis of the corporate strategy and the entry interview

## STUDENT INTERVIEW

| Focus | Data | Questions | Possible probes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Academic background | Data D | 1. Can you introduce yourself? What do you study here? | What made you apply for this university? |
| Sensemaking of internationalisation strategies (free answer) | Data C | 2. Could you describe the international aspects and activities in your faculty?<br>3. Which international activities have you taken part in? What do you think about them?<br>4. In your opinion, what is an international university? | Why do you think so about this international aspect/activity? |
| Sensemaking of internationalisation strategies (stimulated answer**) | Data C | 5. Are you aware of the university's internationalisation or corporate strategy? (show the corporate strategy document) I am going to list the internationalisation strategies as formally stated, and would like to have your comment on each. Have you engaged in any activities related to them? What do you think about those activities? | Why do you think so about this strategy? |

** using data gathered from document analysis of the corporate strategy and the entry interview

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